

**Naval Historical Center
Oral Interview Summary Form**

Interviewers:

CAPT Gary Hall
CAPT Michael McDaniel
CAPT(S) Carol O'Hagan
CDR Karen Loftus
YNCS Kathleen Wright
LNC Jeffrey Luthi

Interviewer's Organization:

Navy Combat Documentation Det 206
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Interviewee:

CAPT Steve O'Brien

Current Address:

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Date of Interview:

15 November 2001

Place of Interview:

Port Mortuary, Dover AFB, Dover DE

Number of Cassettes:

One

Security Classification:

Unclassified

Name of Project: Pentagon Terrorist Attack Incident

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

Abstract of Interview:

1. Born in 1953 in ██████████, NJ. Grew up from 9 years in Toronto, Canada. Moved to NJ again senior year in high school. Attended the Naval Academy and graduated in 1975. Father a pilot of B-24's and B-17's in World War II. One tour of duty in a P-3 squadron; went back to Naval Academy as a company officer. Served with several Vietnam POWs there. Flag lieutenant tour; later assigned to the Naval Space Command. Left active duty in 1985 due to boost in aerospace industry. Saw future of satellite applications to the military. Started a new reserve unit with the Naval Space Command as a department head and later commanded it. Sixteen years in the Naval Reserve. Asked to do a film for the Navy and NASA on the application of Worbel mechanics. Later started a Navy correspondence course called Navy Space. Wrote a chapter for that book called Worbel mechanics. Went to Office of Naval Research HQs unit. Established a new unit in area of satellite applications and development. CO of ONR HQs unit; commanded DCNO N4 unit. Now the Deputy for Mission Effectiveness for REDCOM MidAtlantic since Oct 2000. Twenty-seven years of service as of this date.
2. September 11, 2001 he was at the Navy Yard at a conference; was to be on active duty for four days that weekend. Told the REDCOM Commander that he would be available if necessary. RADM Weaver tasked him to go to Dover DE at the Port Mortuary to head the Navy Liaison Office there. Reported onboard 12 September 2001.

3. ADM Weaver wanted an O-6 at the Port Mortuary after the USS COLE incident due to poor communications; coordination; follow through. That was all the tasking he received prior to his arrival. First told that there was no Navy representation at the mortuary after the COLE incident. Contacted by Mortuary Affairs, Great Lakes (a BUMED command) with an offer of assistance. Morticians HMC Nicholson and HM1 Alonzo arrived to join the team. They brought expertise on policy; payment and transportation of remains. CMD MC Gale Bond from Pers-6 and PN1 Prince Brown from Pers-6/N15 were also sent to Dover to work on the team.
4. Master Chief Bond found them their own space in the Recreation building, next to the mortuary. Allowed them some autonomy; made local decisions and informed Pers-6 later. Pers-6 very supportive of the decisions made by the team. Dealing with many categories of remains means you have to be flexible and adapt to the families' wishes.
5. Categories of remains include active duty, reservist, retired, military dependant of a retiree, military dependant of active duty, military dependant of a reservist, non dependant parent of an active duty. In some of these categories the Navy did not have to take responsibility, but Vice Admiral Ryan made the decision to add those persons to the Navy list. Seven people fell into that category. Upon arrival, they had to determine who was missing. His first list was from an Army O-6 that listed three people that were alive. There was a lot of work in correcting last names and social security numbers. Those providing information did not understand how important accuracy was. One digit wrong in an SSN means there was no DNA or fingerprint match for that individual. The mortuary's list was inaccurate because they were not accurately listing categories of remains. They were short on information from the hierarchy; what was going on in JFAC and Crystal City; OPNAV N1. OPNAV N1 command center provided the confirmation that Vice Admiral Ryan had in fact decided to add a name to the Navy's list.
6. He had to establish early on who was his chain of command; what was the extent of his authority. Orders were from Naval District Washington (NDW); but who was in charge? Admiral Brown, Pers-62 (Navy Casualty)? Also learned of the Navy Comm Cell working for Pers-62. So the flow of information was from them to the Navy Comm Cell, to Pers-62, then to Pers-6. Within the Navy Casualty organization the country is divided up into regions. The Navy Comm cell was the liaison between the regional coordinators throughout the country and the Navy Liaison cell at Port Dover. Flag officers were assigned to every memorial or funeral service. OPNAV N1 coordinated with the flag officers and CACOs on the funeral details. Victims were awarded the Purple Heart and some commands were awarding end of tour awards posthumously. There were also some posthumous promotions. CAPT Marianne Lynch worked the Purple Hearts through SECDEF. The decision was made by CAPT O'Brien and CMD MC Bond that they would pin medals to the remains. Not ribbons. This caused problems with the mortuary director, Mr. Michael Tocchetti, who was resistant to this change. Eventually medals were pinned onto the uniform and a presentation medal was given to the next of kin by the flag officer at the memorial/funeral. End of tour awards were made based on rank. Families will see the uniform. When the casket goes to the funeral home, the funeral director removes the uniform and puts it out on top of the casket with the flag. (This account was disputed off the record by CMD MC Bond, who said that the uniform is not removed and placed on top of the casket). Meticulous care was taken with the uniform. In this case the uniform "is" the person; it is all the family will see.

7. Pers-6 initially took the lead on issues but follow up was not prompt. Spoke with CAPT Sepock, EA for Admiral Brown, who gave CAPT O'Brien the go ahead to make decisions on scene. The first 3-5 weeks an O-6 was essential on the team. All of the other major players had O-6's at the helm. Having an Army and Navy liaison at the mortuary had never happened before. Necessary due to categories of folks, that it was local; the condition of the remains. The mortuary staff works for the 436th Services Squadron. They have a mobilization plan that brings in Air Force or Army Guard personnel from throughout the country in support of mortuary affairs. The staff of the mortuary is mostly civilian; some active duty Air Force; augmented by reservists. AFIP (Armed Forces Institute of Pathology) directs the medical staff. FBI; NCIS both had a presence here.
8. What was needed there was a military officer in charge of the investigation. A command post that would focus all the aspects of the effort. There was never a joint meeting held. He and MC Bond and Prince Brown had to go out every day and collect the information they needed. It took them a week to learn that there were different databases. One was the central database and that was kept sloppily at first with no attention to detail. This caused problems because in several cases the families had sent in medical records and the liaison cell had been told the records were still missing. This caused misinformation going back to the families. Efficiency was required to serve the family of the victims.
9. Flow of information was not consistent. He was not receiving information from external sources. They needed representation at the daily meeting with N1, Pers-6 and NDW. The SITREP generated by the liaison cell went to the Navy Comm Cell; they also received information from the JFAC (Joint Family Assistance Center). Sometimes that information did not agree. If he had been involved in the daily meeting they could have avoided that inconsistency. That would also have saved him from updating different staff.
10. Partial remains were an issue. Dover was willing to release them if the family signed a release. There was no process out there for accepting partial remains. The Navy liaison cell drafted the release form. Pers-62 sat on the form and actually made their own form and sent it to the families. However, it was wrong because it did not address the disposition of partial remains. So it had to be corrected, which meant contacting the families again. General Van Alstyne (JFAC) and VADM Ryan (CNP) were telling families that partial remains were not being shipped even though the day before LCDR Vauk was shipped. The chain of command at Pers-6 was not working.
11. Their roster included 43 Navy personnel from the Pentagon, and 12 from the airplane.
12. Set up of the office consisted of two laptops, a copy machine, and installation of two phone lines and an analog line to handle the computer connection. Master Chief Bond had a supply credit card and he was given carte blanche by Pers-6 to buy whatever they needed. They spent thousands of dollars on uniform items.
13. Their chain in dealing with the CACO's: once identification occurred, it went from the liaison cell to Navy Comm Cell to the regional and then to the CACO's. They did not initiate direct calls to CACOs. Disposition forms were to be provided to the CACO's so

that families could opt for disposition of partial remains. One recurring problem was that CACO's were unaware of the forms; of the availability of disposition of partial remains. Follow through – information obtained by the Navy Liaison to be given to the CACO's- was not done. There was not an effort at the regional level to track every CACO and what they had been told; when they had last come in to get information. The break in the chain in the beginning was the Navy Comm cell, due to lack of continuity. (They are located in Millington TE.) It was manned by reservists without leadership. Now that problem is solved. Great reservists in that cell now. The regionals did not track the CACO's properly. This resulted in next of kin who did not understand the partial remains process.

14. He was not briefed on the CACO process. Assumes there is an instruction. To the letter all feedback from the families has been positive. His criticism is admittedly in the weeds; it could have worked better.
15. Death certificates: lots of detail. Accuracy is key for the Registrar of Vital Statistics in Virginia. This had to be initiated through Pers-6. The death certificate is required by Virginia to be issued within five days. That was violated here. They provided a death certificate to Pers-6 to be filled out immediately. Pers-6 generated a form and sent that to the regionals. They expected a response from Pers-6 within 24-48 hours. NDW casualty filled out the information based on their spreadsheet of the decedent. There was faulty information on those spreadsheets: consequently, the death certificates were incorrect. It needed to go directly to the CACO and to the next of kin. NDW's information was turned in instead, and that incorrect information was forwarded to the Registrar.
16. Partial remains process options: a next of kin can accept partial remains. They would be the remains on hand; identified as belonging to that decedent, at the time they have requested shipment. With cremains, an extra 24-48 hours is needed prior to shipment. The remains are sent to a local crematorium and they are returned to the mortuary for shipment. The first option is that the families not care to know what is the status of later discovered remains. They belong to the Navy. The Navy will do a group cremation and the remains will be disposed like any other medical specimen. Option two: the family opts for a second delivery, either remains in a casket or cremains in an urn. Option three: the family is undecided but requests to be contacted if/when more remains are identified.
17. As of Friday, 16 November 2001, every family will be contacted individually to let them know that the investigation is complete. In the case of a next of kin that elected option one, they will have the opportunity to ask the question. They will ask, and the CACO's will know the status of each of the remains. In this case he will go directly to the CACO to let them know the status. Those who have elected for option three will be asked during that phone call what they prefer to do.
18. As for the terrorists, there were four – five hijackers on the aircraft. The FBI believes they have remains associated with the size, bone makeup of the Southwest Asian/Middle Eastern descent. He does not know how many they have; as of 15 November there was only one civilian on the aircraft who had not been identified. One person on the aircraft was identified by one half of a finger. To get the fingerprint, due to the finger's rigidity in death, the skin is peeled off, placed on a live person's finger, and rolled onto the pad. They spent a lot of time scavenging for dental/medical records.

19. As for identification, DNA was not available for civilians. Some did not have medical/dental records. Some were identified by a major surgery. In one case the medical examiner discovered that one person had recently undergone heart bypass surgery. The question went out to family members to attempt to identify that person based on the recent surgery.
20. He had direct contact with two of the families because they initiated it. Recommended that either a priest or the CACO be with them when he spoke with them because they would not like what they would hear.
21. His and Master Chief's Bond's trip to the damaged section of the Pentagon helped him to understand why the bodies were in the condition they were in. Explained why the identification process was so difficult. The dogs going through the rubble picked out small pieces of tissue that made a difference in identifying these people. Explained the location of the individuals; why they died of smoke inhalation. He spoke of LTJG McKeown and what a great individual she was.
22. He recommends someone from the command be the escort of the body home. Was not done for N3/N5. (He does not know that N3/N5 provided CACO duties for their people. Due to the decimation of their ranks in the attacks and OPTEMPO in the resulting war they were probably precluded from sending command participation as escorts.) Reservists from the Northeast were called down to do the job who did not know the individual; tended to be impersonal.
23. His father died in 1995. He had lung cancer but it was still sudden. He provided the honors. Could not get anyone to do honors at the funeral in Leesburg, Virginia. He spoke at the funeral.
24. He asks that we pray for the families. The thousands of families in New York who will never reach closure. Their loved one will never be identified nor will they have anything to bury. Many will be bitter about all of this.
25. He has learned compassion through this. Learned about himself and how he deals with a crisis. How to put his personal affairs in order. Talks of the Orthodox Jewish faith and their view on autopsies.
26. Expects to be working on contingency battle planning for ADM Weaver. Also on lessons learned. There was a proposal for a Flag Officer Casualty Advisory Board (FOCAB) several years ago; it was never realized. Now it is on a front burner to convene this board. Focus will be to pull together the lessons learned, and to be prepared for a subsequent attack. He also expects to brief ADM Weaver as well.
27. Stress: One of the Chaplain's from the Northeast asked him if they had undergone Critical Incident Stress (CIS) debrief. He responded no. He was told at a REDCOM CO's conference that CIS was critical. He recognizes that they all probably need counseling. Will make this a priority in the near future. He does not think he needs it, but does not sleep. Can go through the list of all 55 by himself. Recalls the foot of the three year old. The whole family was lost in that attack. Does not blame anyone for their

anger. Asked by CACO's if their family member suffered. The people on the aircraft did not suffer at the time of the explosion, but they had twelve minutes to suffer prior to the accident. He saw one skull, with hair, believed to be a woman, and saw expressions in that mouth that tell him of the extreme fear and fright of how they died. People who died of smoke inhalation suffered. Autopsy reports do not automatically go to the next of kin; they must request it. Then they will learn what parts were found; how they died. A very good reason to pray for the families.

28. There is no room for thanks: he is just doing his job. Credits Master Chief Bond for getting "into people's knickers and doing his job."

Abstract by: CDR Loftus
26 November 2001

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Interviewees Information: Born in 1953 in ██████████, NJ. Grew up from 9 years in Toronto, Canada. Moved to NJ again senior year in high school. Attended the Naval Academy and graduated in 1975. Father was a pilot of B-24's and B-17's in World War II flying out of North Africa. He flew one tour in a P-3 squadron and then went back to Naval Academy as a company officer. While at the Academy he served with several Vietnam POWs who were teaching there. Flag lieutenant tour; later assigned to the Naval Space Command. He served a total of 10 ½ years on active duty.

Left active duty in 1985 due to boost in aerospace industry. Saw future of satellite applications to the military. Started a new reserve unit with the Naval Space Command as a department head and later commanded it. He has served sixteen years in the Naval Reserve. Asked to do a film for the Navy and NASA on the application of Worbel mechanics. Later started a Navy correspondence course called Navy Space. Wrote a chapter for that book called Worbel mechanics. Went to Office of Naval Research HQs unit. Established a new unit in area of satellite applications and development. CO of ONR HQs unit; commanded DCNO N4 unit. Now the Deputy for Mission Effectiveness for REDCOM MidAtlantic since Oct 2000. Twenty-seven years of service as of this date.

Topics Discussed:

TRACK ONE

Q. (11:33) Tell us a little bit about how you got involved in your current assignment here at the Port Mortuary.

A. OK. September 11th I happened to be at the REDCOM Mid Atlantic in a staff meeting getting ready for the annual CO Conference and, of course, that's when all the attacks took place. We were locked in the Navy Yard and so during that time frame I told the deputy commander, I said, "I'm going on active duty on Thursday for four days." I said I had specific projects lined up to do and I was going to be a guest speaker at a change of command down at the Reserve Center in Roanoke, and things of that nature. I said, "You know, just give me a holler if you need any assistance with anything." Because we had no idea really what this was at the time. You can just imagine, I had visions at that point of time of our center. I had just been the previous weekend up to Erie, you know. The reserve Center in Erie, you know, it's in a neighborhood. A lot of these Reserve Centers we have are in really nice looking neighborhoods, Harrisburg, and Erie and, or, there's no protection for them at all. None.

So I had envisioned right away that we're going to have a protection issue for our Reserve Centers, and that did come to fruition. So I just said, you know, 'Give me a call if you need any help'.

She was immediately called up late that afternoon to a staff meeting with Naval District Washington, Admiral Weaver's office. She came out of that meeting and she said, "Ok if I give Admiral Weaver your bio?"

I said, "Sure," and the next day I got a call from the Chief of Staff there, saying can you report tomorrow. She actually said, "How soon can you be out at Dover, Delaware Port Mortuary?"

I said, "I can be there first thing tomorrow morning." Little did I know at that point in time that Admiral Brown had offered up Master Chief Bond and over at the PERS-6 Det at Navy Annex, PN1 Brown was offered up, and all I was told was there were going to be a couple of other Navy folks when I got here.

Q. (13:53) You didn't know from where?

A. Oh I had no idea from where. I had no idea what names. Nothing like that. All I was told was to check in with Colonel Steve Westoff who's the Commander of the 436th Services Squadron here, and I just reported in and that's when I found out what I was supposed to do.

So I had about twelve hours notice. Went home and packed. Well, went to work. Tried to wrap up a bunch of things at work, and it was pretty hectic. I didn't leave work until after midnight.

Went home and packed. Slept for about an hour. Hoped in the car, went down 350 toward Annapolis, pulled over. Slept for an hour, then got here.

I just felt that, you know, there was going to be a lot of work to be done, and I've always known all along there's not a lot of opportunity for O-6s sometimes, you know, when it comes to active duty recall. You really don't need, I think they are pretty top heavy in the Naval Reserve to be very honest. There's a lot more opportunity for O-4s and for E-7s and E-6s and that, I think, in the Naval Reserve and that's where we really should concentrate our efforts. So I just offered and once you offer you don't say, "Well, no, I don't think that would be a very good idea." But I really had no idea what I was— really was in store for, and I really thought, everybody really thought we'd only be out here for a few weeks.

Q. (15:40) What sort of guidance did you get from NDW other than show up here? I mean what did they tell you you were going to do?

A. I spoke with the Chief of Staff that afternoon when the Deputy Commander called and said he needed to get a hold of Kathy Cummings, I called her and all she could tell me she said, “Admiral Weaver wants an O-6 out to Port Mortuary, Dover and he bases this on experience with the *Cole*.” (*USS COLE*) He said that the information flow, the coordination, the follow through, all the activity associated with the *Cole* victims was, I don’t know if she used the word deplorable, unsatisfactory. I can’t remember what it was, but Admiral Weaver was not pleased with it, and so he recognized right away the extent of what was going to be involved and wanted an O-6 out there that could run the effort. That’s all she told me.

So I just came out here, baptism by fire essentially and tried to identify what all the specific aspects of the responsibilities here. Sat down with Master Chief Bond and Petty Officer Brown and put a quick little plan together of what we needed to attack first and just went on hour by hour, and day by day after that to put the thing together. I can go on for lots of time about all that.

Q. (17:06) Yes, can you tell us about the plan? I think that’s one of the things we want to try to understand is, how did this all come together. Just a little follow-up question on what you said about this is based on information from the *Cole*. Did you know what there was here during *Cole*? I assume that there were, there was some Navy representation here.

A. Well, the first thing I was told that there wasn’t, and then when I was first contacted by the Navy Mortuary office out of Great Lakes, by Commander Davis, and fortunately, something at the back of my head said, “I ought to take this offer for assistance.” But this was on, he called Friday the, what the 15th, Friday the 14th right. He called Friday afternoon the 14th. Called again on Saturday the 15th, again on Sunday the 16th, and he was offering to send out a team of Navy morticians, three folks. He gave me three names. I had no idea what make and model they were,

and I said, "I never even heard of a Navy mortician." I knew there were tons of morticians right in the mortuary right now, what value would they offer me. They're just going to get in the way, because you saw the physical location right now. I knew I already had two Chaplains there, I had three folks. I'm saying, "Where am I going to put these guys? What am I going to do with them?" I don't want somebody to come in here and just twiddling their thumbs and just getting in the way essentially.

So I said, "No, let me just, let me address all the other issues that are going on right here, right now, and I'll get back to you." I said, "Let's talk again on Sunday." Well, he called again on Saturday.

In the meantime I learned that one of the folks that he wanted to send out here, a civilian, had worked in the Navy Mortuary Office, was persona non grata here, absolutely. That person had been out here before, and apparently that person made a phone call to Port Mortuary indicating that she and others were coming out and I immediately had people coming to me and saying, "You can't let this happen, and I can't go into details. Probably aren't that important."

So I called Commander Davis back and I said, "She is not welcome here. I do not want her. Don't send her. " And then on Sunday, we decided to send Chief Nickerson and Petty Officer Alonzo out here.

The only reason I agreed to that was that something in the back of my head was saying, 'It's probably a good thing.' Well it was. It was the best thing that really happened because they had the expertise on all of the policy and details that govern the payment and transportation of remains. We had absolutely no idea about any of that. What the limitations were. How you categories, whether it be active duty, reserve, retired, military dependent, dealing with civilians. There's all sorts of different policies governing each one of those. We had no idea what any of

that was. And so it was very fortuitous that they came out on Monday the 18th, if I remember correctly. Maybe it was Tuesday. It was Tuesday and then they were here for the next few weeks.

Anyway going back to the, I'm not sure if I got off track on that, but going back to the first couple of days. Master Chief Bond and Petty Officer Brown got here a couple of hours, they got here the evening before I did, and because I ended up sleeping on the road for an hour or an hour and a half, I got here about eight thirty, nine o'clock on Friday morning. They had already checked in with the mortuary and they wanted to put us in that main room over at the mortuary there where, you can imagine at that point in time there were fifty people running around in that room. And for no other, for probably no other reason, just to kind of break away, the Master Chief decided that no, find us another place and we were located over in the Rec Building, which turned out to be a very good idea.

Now one of the things that—you have a lot of aspects to where we are that have proven to be not so good, but there are times in there where you had three people on three different phones on the Army side. Us over on the Navy side, two different phones. We couldn't even hear each other speak. We couldn't hear people on the other end of the phone. Now there's a lot of lessons learned as far as when you're in this type situation, you're there for a long haul. You've got a lot, a lot going on in a short period of time that necessitate some other kind of arrangement if it happens again in the future. But it's good that we were put over there, because none of that could have taken place effectively if it hadn't been over in the main building. Plus we would have had folks over there looking over our shoulder the entire time and perhaps later, I'm sure you heard a little bit from Master Chief Bond and maybe even Petty Officer Brown, that there are things that we were told, "No! No! No!" many, many times that we couldn't do and it wasn't the right thing

to do. We thought it was the right thing and pursued it and made certain decisions locally and told PERS-6 about them late, you know, secondly, and basically had the support of PERS-6 on all of the decisions that have been made here locally regardless of the fact that the mortuary was telling us, “No, you can’t do,” things.

It’s just a long history. You saw the history of the mortuary and it gets a lot of kudos and everything, but there’s too much, “We’ve always done it this way” mentality in the mortuary and that’s not the way, in a situation like this when you’re dealing with many, many different types of, I always use the word “categories.” Categories of remains, you have to understand, you know, be more understanding of what some of the requirements are out there, and what he primary next of kin are requesting and so forth.

Q. (23:43) What do you mean by categories of remains?

A. Categories I—active duty, reservist on active duty, reservist, retired, military dependent of retiree, military dependent of active duty, dependent of a reservist, non-dependent parent of a active duty. We have all these categories and essentially as you get down into some of these very strange categories, the Navy really has no responsibility whatsoever for any of them. So it took a, it required Vice Admiral Ryan to make the decision that we’re going to accept this set of remains as a Navy responsibility and we’re going to fund the disposition of those remains.

Q. (24:30) Was that based on a recommendations that you had made or, -?

A. No, no, we weren’t told first. I would get calls, I would get calls saying, “Add this person to your list. Or all of a sudden I would catch a glimpse of an email where they’re talking about somebody, and there saying, and I’ve got to interject and say, “Who is this person.”

“Oh, haven’t you been told. Vice Admiral Ryan’s approved the Navy to work with this per—to work on this set of remains.” So there were about seven people I think, in that category.

When we first got here, the first thing, besides trying to find a place to work out of and getting things set up there, the first thing we did was, “Who are we dealing with?” I got a list. The list I got was from an Army O-6 in the records of all the people he was carrying from the Navy. There were forty-nine people on the list. Three of them turned out to be alive. So for the first day or so we’re carrying three people that were in fact alive. So we quickly ironed that out, and we had a lot of bad names. Last names we couldn’t track, and we’d send a name off and they’d say, “Well, who’s this person?” Found out that it’s spelled completely wrong. Social Security numbers were wrong, and that was a big, big problem in the beginning.

Nobody—PERS-6 and others that were providing information to us did not understand how important accuracy was. If you had one digit wrong in a Social Security number you couldn’t find DNA on that person. You couldn’t find a fingerprint on that person. That was the case in many, many—you know, I’d get this list. No DNA, No DNA. I’m going, “How can it be there’s no DNA on these people?” Sure enough their Social Security number was provided to us incorrectly. So we had to—just little, little details like that that could have delayed, you know, for extensive periods of time, you know, the identification of people.

So that was our first challenge, was figuring out who are we dealing with, because we really didn’t know. The mortuary had a list and it was very inaccurate as far as who’s Navy, who’s Army, who’s civilian, and so forth.

We had to iron out a few little nits and noise with the mortuary, because they said, “How can you accept, Mrs. Steuerle, the parent of a Navy active duty Lieutenant. You know, she’s a civilian as far as we’re concerned. I have to sit there and say, ‘No, she’s not. She’s Navy. OK, listen to me, she’s Navy.’” Now, that’s one of the things that Vice Admiral Ryan approved.

I think Admiral Ryan apparently—you know one of the things we were really short on was information from the hierarchy. They were going out—particularly going on at JFAC and Crystal City. What OPNAV N1 was doing in their command center, but we would get these names and one of the things was validating that it's a bona fide name, and finding out that it just didn't match what would normally be a Navy responsibility. So Vice Admiral—I had to get—be sure that Vice Admiral Ryan had in fact approved.....

Q. (27:52) How did you do that?

A. Through the Command Center OPNAV N1 Command Center. I would send an email off and they'd send them back.

Q. (28:02) Did you have to establish your liaison with them, or how—did they contact you knowing you were the Navy's liaison or something?

A. No, and that was all just all very haphazard. You know I talked about the fact to try and establish who we're dealing with right away on Friday. The other part of it is, who do we work for. Over who—where's the line of responsibility? What is my authority to make decisions or whatever. You know Admiral Weaver sent me out here, so, and my orders were being modified to Naval District, Washington. They were originally to RECCOM Mid Atlantic because I'd had those four days of orders already set up. So in one way I had a responsibility to NDW and Rear Admiral Weaver, but I knew right away that he wasn't in charge of this, and not everybody that I was dealing with as far as the victims were all members of that Naval District Washington. There were others involved here. Of course, of course there's lots of civilian contractors and other things like that, but fortunately Master Chief Bond understood the PERS-6 organization and he said right away, you know, "You've got Admiral Brown and you've got PERS-62." PERS-62 is responsible for Navy Casualty Affairs. So at that point in time, I picked up the phone, got a hold

of Mike Wardlaw (phonetic) PERS-62 and understood that yes he's the person essentially in charge for Admiral Brown. So established that line of communications. At that point of time we learned that there was a Navy Comm Cell under PERS-6 working for PERS-62. So that was the Command Center down there. So information that we were going to funnel was going to go through the Navy Comm Cell. Through PERS-62, through PERS-6.

But of course, Admiral Brown worked for Admiral Hauling (phonetic) Admiral Hauling (phonetic) works for Vice Admiral Ryan and so forth. We established that chain of command and ancillary to that was within the Navy Casualty organization you have the country divided up in to regions. So you have regional coordinators, who I understand, I think, are all civilians. So at that point in time I understood that Navy Comm Cell would then send out their information to the regional coordinators or get information from the regional coordinators and send it on to us. So we quickly established what the lines of communication were, the chain of command and then of course, then I learned about this OPNAV N1 Command Center. I didn't really understand probably for, probably for three to four days what they were really doing.

And of course, once again there was no info—there was very little information coming to us. We had to go out and reach out for it. That's when I learned that the Navy had decided that they were going to participate in the memorial services and funerals and everything for everyone of these victims and they were going to assign flag officers to it. Being very ignorant, you know, I've been to funerals before, but I've never really been responsible. I've never been a CACO. So that's when I understood that there was a lot of details associated with—between the CACOs and families and OPNAV N1 on the details of these funerals and memorial services and everything else to bring, you know, official Navy representation to closure of all these victims and that's what OPNAV N1 Command Center was coordinating apparently.

The other part of it was awards. We had heard rumor, once again that the victims were going to be awarded the Purple Heart and some of the commands for the victims were awarding end of tour awards posthumously, and we also heard that there were a couple—trying to figure out the rank on these folks was a real challenge, because we'd see everything. All sorts of ranks and rates and everything else and we learned that there were going to be some posthumous, excuse me, promotions. We had to iron out some of those details, and OPNAV N1 was handling the awards. Captain Marianne Lynch was working the Purple Hearts through SECDEF. We wanted to make sure that—we felt we had a responsibility for preparing the remains in such a way that the families would be please and it would help the families, you know, know that the Navy cared about their loved ones.

We had to make sure we had the right rack on there and I decided that we were going to put Purple Hearts and the tour awards on them, the medals on them, so that when the family saw the uniform, they saw him, as he or she should go into the ground. So we decided to put the medals on them as well, the flag officer who was attending these memorial services and burials would bring a presentation medal to give to the next of kin. We wanted to make sure we had the correct award on them. There was a lot going on with the awards for about a week, week and a half.

Q. (32:28) Can you tell us about that?

A. The awards themselves?

Q. (33:33) Well, just about the issue of dealing with that. Was there any resistance to that?

A. Oh, absolutely. The mortuary said absolutely not. Said, "We've never put them. Well, we've never done that before," you know, and I said, "But that's not right. You still have the remains here. This person has been awarded Purple Heart, or Navy Com or MSM, or whatever, and we're going to put them on them, you know. They're going to be presented to the family as those

awards were presented to them. Posthumous, we still have them. We're putting the awards on them." So much to Mr. Tocchetti's dismay we put them on there.

We had to have a record, you know. Everything that we were doing that was not in accordance with whatever policies that exist, which I never saw any policies.

Q. (34:27) I was going to say, are they written anywhere?

A. (Chuckle) We had to provide in writing, and that was fine. We don't care. You know, so we would write up, I would sign, our Master Chief would sign a little note indicating that so and so's going to wear the Purple Heart, the MSM, and we'd put that on record in the mortuary and then we prepared the uniform for him. Lot of little things like that. Everything had to be done in writing. That's OK.

There was a little bit of confusion. Like Petty Officer Cooper. OK, reservist AT1 was one of the few reservists involved and was not on active duty at the time, OK. So does he, is he awarded a Purple Heart? The answer's no, but we had lots of correspondence saying, "Yes, yes, yes."

You know I'm trying to support what's right and I had to submit the questions, and then finally got a hold of Marianne and she didn't have the answer right away, but then we resolved it and said, "No, he's not being awarded the Purple Heart," which was the right thing. He was not on active duty. He was not in uniform or in the service of the Navy at the time. He was a contractor, I think with Brady (phonetic) Incorporated.

And then of course the other end of tour awards. There had to be major decisions made on rank and what they were going to be. Of course we know that the O-6s, I think, yes the O-6s got. No, O-5s and O-6s got Legion of Merit. The O-4s and below got Meritorious Service Medals (MSM). E's, the Chiefs got Meritorious Service Medals, and E-6 and below got Navy Comm's if I remember correctly. That's not official. Pretty sure that was the decision that was made. But

those had to come from Command. So they had to come up through the chain of command and we're actually preparing to send remains out when we still did not have resolution the night before and the morning of on an award. So we were anxious to get that so we put the proper thing, the proper award on there, and they all did go on properly.

But it was interesting because I bring up Petty Officer Cooper. I really got wrung through—I got put through the wringer by a Chief at Naval District Washington about Petty Officer Cooper. He was cremated and they wanted to know, they wanted to know for sure, they were testing me to find out whether or not he had a Purple Heart on him when he was cremated. So it's a good thing that we kept good records of phone conversations and other things where I could actually take that person through the process of why I was sure we didn't put a Purple Heart on him.

I'm not sure why I had to convince somebody at Naval District Washington of that, but so be it.

Lot of issues from NDW Casualty Center.

I don't know what more you want about awards, but that's—we just thought it was very important to present the medals, the posthumous awards and put them on the uniform so that the families saw, that's what they saw.

All families besides the two, all victims who we actually could clothe in a uniform, Petty Officers Flocco and Earhart, the only thing the families are going to see is the uniform unless they really convince other people that they want to open up the casket. All they're going to see is the uniform. That's it.

Q. (38:29) How would they see the uniform?

A. When the casket would go to the funeral home, the funeral director will go ahead and open up the casket, remove the uniform and put it out on top of the casket.

Q. (38:40) I see, OK, well we did not know that. I see.

A. So it's pulled out and that's all they'll see.

Q. OK.

A. We have no reports back as to whether or not next of kin actually asked for caskets to be open to learn that.

Q. (38:57) So how does that work with the flag, too? You know, the flag is normally draped over the casket.

A. What I understand, the uniform is put on top of the flag, OK. That's what I know. Having not been to any of them—

Q. (39:09) The flag's not folded back halfway?

Q. Maybe it is. Personally I would think that would be more appropriate, to fold it back halfway and that, but I don't know how that was done. I sometimes wish I'd had a chance to go see a memorial service, participate a little bit, but didn't have that opportunity. But we, you know, the uniforms are prepared, and this is—the credit goes to Master Chief Bond entirely for this. You know, it was, you know, I remember—I didn't mean to sneak in and to listen to the last part of master Chief's interview yesterday, but one of the things that he mentioned was how we complemented each other and that is the absolute truth. There were things, that—there were so many things that we needed him for that I would not have been very effective in doing, and vice versa. And one of the things that he paid very, very close attention to was excruciating detail on the uniforms. To the point at which the mortuary, Staff Sergeant Jamison is probably very appreciative of understanding and seeing the—how important it was to Master Chief Bond that every Irish Pennant, every piece of lint, everything was off of that uniform. That the neckerchief was tied correctly. He tied every one of the neckerchiefs for every one of the Petty Officers that went out, and medals put on properly. He had the precise rack of ribbons. When we first got here

the only uniforms they had for Navy was the old version. They went out and bought, he spent, I guess over ten thousand dollars on uniforms, and uniform items in a very short period of time. Most of them, you know, all overnight delivery, and he spent a lot of time making sure that was done right, because that's the only thing these families are going to see, is that uniform. He did a superb job on that.

You know we may sit back, some people may sit back and say, 'A uniforms a uniform,' but in this case it's not. It's a person, and that's important. So he did an excellent job among other things, with that. He made the difference there.

Q. (41:40) The issue with the awards, will that become a policy change? Is that something that you're looking for?

A. The Army didn't do it.

Q. (41:50) What about Navy in the days—God forbid something like this happening again, but...

A. Well, you know, in my out brief to Admiral Brown, I'll be having a list of recommendations and I'll also list certain decisions that were made locally that caused a little fury either locally or—we talk about partial remains later and it caused a lot of fury. But, you know, I don't know the answer to that. Nobody took issue that we were doing it. You know, somebody could have right away said, "Well, gee you're spending an extra sixty dollars on each one of these active duty, maybe, and reservists on active duty," you know and somebody could even say something as little as that, you know. Sixty dollars is, you know, a pittance. We just, you know, we decided it and pushed it locally. We let people know that we decided to do that; there's nobody going to take issue on that.

Q. (42:50) Could you describe for us the whole process, but it probably wasn't that well organized for you to get the local autonomy that you needed to do your job here?

A. Right away you could see that there were folks in PERS-6 that wanted to make sure they had control over everything that's going on up here. And that's OK, you know, I'll take direction from anybody, but it was quite evident right away that we would be raising significant issues and getting absolutely no response from down there. And that's when I started to see Captain Sepock, who is the Chief of Staff or EA for Admiral Brown and he intervened, and essentially he called up and said, you know, I don't—he thought he knew who I was, but he didn't. Turned out it was a different O'Brien that he knew. But we talked on the phone and he says, "You've got our support," you know. "We trust you. You're not going to go out and make bonehead decisions and just go ahead and let us know what you're deciding and I'll run gunshot down here." That's what he did. Essentially got on their case down there, because they were not responding to significant request for information that we needed up here, and where we needed decisions made. So that was not an issue externally through that line of communications, action and command. Here locally, I think, you know, there's no reason to have an O-6 here right now, today. There wasn't last week, there probably wasn't the week before, but the first three, four or five weeks, it was essential.

The head of the medical examiner's team, O-6. All of the other critical or essential aspects of the process were senior civilians or O-6s. And then dealing with a predominantly civilian mortuary staff who has been here for years and years and years, and ingrained in this "We've always done it this way" mentality, I'm not saying that an O-6 would carry more weight than an O-5, but—although we, every time an E-9 would go over there and address issues, you know, an E-9 got told no. Not going to do it. And so that's when I would have to go over and that's where we

complement each other again, between Master Chief Bond and myself, and explain in a different way why this is important and it needs to be done that way. Then we could get concurrence from the mortuary director on that. So that was important. And that's one of my recommendations would always be and will be Admiral Brown's to continue to do it that way, but then send up another officer after a few weeks and where that person would get trained for a few days and then turn over. At this point in time, I'm not going to let—I'm not going to bail out and let the continuity falter at the expense of the CACOs and the next of kin of the victims, because there's a lot of nuances that have to be carried through to make sure they get address properly in the last few weeks.

Q. (46:20) Were there group meetings with—I know that when this happens, the impression is that there are a lot of organizations that come in from outside to support the mortuary, and I'm kind of wondering how the flow of information went from here and among the several interested parties that were here.

A. Well the first thing is that having an Army liaison and a Navy liaison at the mortuary here, that's never happened before. So having those liaisons here was something new for the mortuary and probably, although I probably didn't get too much inclination, probably was perceived as “Why, what do you need that—we can handle all this. We're actually set up to handle mass casualties.”

Q. (47:21) We've done it that way before?

A. Yes, but, you know, you take a look at that list of casualties that they dealt with before and it's, its, a different situation. There were so many aspects of this: the condition of the remains, the fact that it was a little bit more local than it has, than a casualty has ever been before, the different categories of folks. We looking at loss of civilians mixed in with military and so forth.

There were a lot of unique aspects of this casualty situation. Although I suspect that they were wondering why the Navy had to have presence here, and why the Army, but we didn't get any resis—at least I didn't notice any resistance for that.

Yes, there are a tremendous number of groups, and to this day I couldn't even ex—I don't even know where all these people came from.

I'd be back in the mortuary and a person in blue garb would walk up and introduce himself to me, and it's a Navy Captain, you know, who happens to be a dentist. So we just had a conversation for—so this whole medical team that Captain Wagner had put together, I have no idea where they all came from. What make and model they were. They were medical, all I knew, and then there was this very large group of reservists that were brought in from different units from all over the country to support—you know, some were embalmers. So you had a team of embalmers in there. Others were personal effects. Others were working with the dentist. Others were working with carrying in the pouches off, to meet the helicopter and put them in the truck and then out of the truck and into the, you know, and then all the cleanup that had to be done everyday.

So there were just hundreds of people there, all I think, understanding what their responsibility was and that's what their jobs were. I have no idea where they all came from.

You know it's a—the mortuary staff works for the 436th, you know, Services Squadron. That's who they come under and then I guess they have a mobilization plan or some kind or a recall plan of which all these units are designated support mortuary affairs, but are all Guard or Air Force, and they come in, you know, they're recalled and they come in and support the casualty. So it's an Air Force organization and it's a local civilian mortuary staff, but a few active duty Air Force and then all these reservists. And then the medical team is adjunct, you know, they're here

to do their thing and take charge of the actual investigation, analysis, reports and so forth, and that's all done under the direction of AFIP (Armed Forces Institute of Pathology).

Then of course, this situation as well as others I'm sure in the past, you had the FBI, and the first thing I, you know, learned when I came here is the FBI was in charge. OK. They, you know, this is a federal investigation, the FBI was in charge, and so nothing could be done without their acknowledgement of what was being done, and why and where, and—because their biggest concern at the outset, you know, was the x-ray process. You know, are there any remains where there might be some other weapons or explosive devices, or incendiary, or anything else in there that would lead, would tend to aid in the investigation of who this was, why this happened and so forth?

NCIS (Navy Criminal Investigative Service) was here, so they would report into me everyday, two agents. They're here predominantly because they knew that the INTELCELL (phonetic) for the Command Center was hit. They lost four or six people in there and they wanted to make, you know, with all the papers and everything else that would be accompanying some of these people, they were carrying folders or whatever, they wanted to make sure there wasn't any classified information, and there was. And there was, so they took care of all the classified information. They reported to me everyday too, we had two NCIS workers. They were very helpful.

Yes, we would learn a lot about the investigation. What was going on between the FBI guys and the NCIS agents. Petty Officer Brown and I purposely set ourselves up for a tour of the Pentagon with the NCIS folks, a few weeks later, just before he was leaving and we went and toured the Pentagon and had an opportunity to understand why we're getting what we're getting and what the difficulty was with finding remains and just a little bit of additional information that would help us assist the CACOs and explain things to the next of kin.

Q. (53:02) Did you, were there every any, did the director of the mortuary ever hold a joint meeting to talk about the information flow? One of the things we learned yesterday was that it seemed a little haphazard how you found out about the identifications and things like that.

A. That's probably the biggest observation and biggest criticism about this whole process. What was needed here was a military officer in charge of the investigation. A command post set up on the military side so they could focus all the aspects of the effort, and that's going to be very clearly stated.

No, the answer's no, we did not have a joint meeting, and so what I did and Master Chief Bond and Petty Officer Brown, is we went about going off in different directions everyday to collect the information that we needed, and it was very cumbersome. Painstaking. We probably didn't learn until the better part of almost a week that there were different databases. We found a loophole in one of them where the guy just could have cared less about thoroughness and attention to detail. He was the guy who was keeping the database of all the records on file. Big issue, and I blew up when I found that out, an O-5 Lt. Colonel Smith, won't use names, who— finally Petty Officer Brown came back and said, 'You know, this guy would rather not have me coming by any longer.'

So the next day I went with Petty Officer Brown and when I started finding out that wait a minutes, "You told us yesterday you had this record, but it wasn't in the database of having record." So we would actually go to the files and actually start physically looking through the record and sure enough they're there.

Then I brought the O-6 Colonel Natembal (phonetic) who was the person who receipted for every record coming in, who this Lt. Colonel worked for. I had the Colonel in there and we recognized about twenty, thirty loopholes in the database.

On the one hand I'm out telling Navy Comm in the Casualty Center, "We need these records. Get these records." And they're saying, "The families found them and submitted them three days ago." And we were showing record of not having them. In some cases they were there. So we're driving families crazy back in, you know, and of course they'd got enough grief that they're dealing with and everything else, because I'm telling them we don't have it. So attention to detail did not exist over here, where it really, really, really mattered.

Q. (56:05) Over here being-

A. It's easy for me to—at the mortuary—it's easy for me to say that, you know, point fingers at, "Gee, you're provided the right Social Security number and the right spelling of the name. Gee you don't have the right records here." You know I can always point these fingers out there and they could probably be pointed back at me, things that we did wrong, too. And I'm sure we did do some things wrong, but with this number of people, the attention that was being paid to this type of effort, the condition of the remains, and not knowing what we were really dealing with just required that we were, that we were being as exact as possible and as efficient as possible all in the, with the goal in mind to serve the next of kin of the victim. That's all I ever was concerned with was that we were doing our best to identify as quickly as possible the remains and letting the families know so we can get them shipped home and get closure to their loved one. That's it. That's all we wanted to do, and there were a lot of imperfections in the process.

Q. (57:27) Could you tell us a little bit about—we heard a little bit that you were—that the liaison office was being requested to provide a lot of information from here. Now you said the information back to your questions was a little spotty, but the demands on getting information from you, what was going on here was, I guess maybe even overwhelming at the beginning. Could you tell us a little bit about that and how you settled that out?

A. Information externally, requests coming in externally to get information out?

Q. (57:56) Demands on you to provide information flow-out. What was going on here? Reports of status, the frequency and how you worked to kind of settle out the—what allowed you to do your job.

A. That's another reason for having someone senior here, because as an O-6 I got the attention of the Senior Medical Examiner. I got the attention of the FBI Special Agent in charge. So all those key people would talk to me and that's how I could find out what the real status of the investigation was. Now, General Van Alstyne who I guess was the head of this JFAC back in Crystal City, you know he would be getting, he would be on the phone with probably the same group of people everyday so he could put the correct information out to all the families that were at the Sheraton trying to get information on that.

At that same time, and we had this whole casualty organization that are supporting those families and that casualty organization had to know what was going on also. So funnel of information wasn't consistent and I certainly wasn't getting any information from the external sources.

One of the lessons learned is that our office, me, or Master Chief or somebody needed to be involved in the daily meeting that took place between N1, PERS-6 and NDW, because the only information that they would get—Ok, my information, my SITREP would go out to the Navy Comm Cell, OK? They would also get information from the JFAC. Sometimes that information didn't agree.

If I had been involved in the, either just over the telephone in a conference call each day with Admiral Ryan and Admiral Hauling and Admiral Weaver and Admiral Brown and the staff folks we could have clarified a lot of small issues, well major issues also, that were resolved afterwards without—this would be resolved on the spot with everybody hearing it and being able

to ask the questions they wanted as opposed to being resolved later and information getting out piecemeal.

So, you know, besides the lesson about having a military command post set up here to bring structure to the effort, to focus the issues, to update the entire group on the status of the remains, on the status of records, personal effects. What they were telling JFAC. What they were hearing from JFAC. You here it from the medical examiner on what the status is. Even to this day that meeting should be taking place, but we had to go out and get that information each time.

Q. (1:01:05) And it never had? There was never such a joint meeting, never?

A. No, never had a joint meeting. So that being one. The other part then from the Navy perspective was having the liaison here involved in the morning meeting. That should have happened. It didn't. So I would get all these questions coming in after the morning meeting. Admiral Brown would pick up the phone, or Mike Wardlaw (phonetic) or Admiral Weaver or whatever and I'd get these phone calls.

I got phone calls from JFAC and one of the things that was a real travesty, that I was getting calls from Senator Biden's office on behalf of Lt. Comdr. Vauk and, because the wife, she really wanted to get this over with very quickly. And of course, we had partial remains, and the question came in, "Why won't Dover release the remains?"

I said, "We'll, be happy to release the remains. However, the next of kin has to release, accept partial remains." Well there was no process out there for requesting partial remains. So we drafted up this form. Master Chief Bond and Chief Nicholson drafted up this form. We sent it down to PERS-6 and they sat on it, and we're saying, "We need this addressed, right away." I mean this was very, very important. Get it addressed right away.

Well, over the, it didn't get addressed in two hours or twelve hours, it got addressed in about twenty-four hours and unbeknownst to us they went ahead and did up their own form and sent it out.

Well, when these forms came in to us, faxed in for partial remains, we looked at it and we go, "This is wrong. This does not answer the requirements of dispositioning partial remains." We found out that Sandy DuBois (phonetic) had made up this form. She didn't even send it back to us and ask us to review it. It was wrong. So we had to get that corrected right away.

Q. (1:03:13) This is PERS-62.

A. Yes, in the meantime we had to get Lt. Commander Vauk out the door. So Mike Wardlaw (phonetic) knew all along that we were dispositioning partial remains. He did not inform the chain of command of that. General Van Alstyne and Vice Admiral Ryan told all the family at the JFAC at the Sheraton that we are not, at this time, we are not shipping partial remains. The day before Lt. Comdr. Vauk had already been out the door. So wrong information went out and for days we had been working this and the information did not flow up the chain of command.

That could have been a big embarrassment. You know, it was corrected the next day, but there was no reason not to—what was being lost here was the concern for the families. What wasn't getting conveyed back to Vice Admiral Ryan or General Van Alstyne that there were families there that wanted closure. Mrs. Vauk wanted closure. Well, there's no reason she can't have closure. You can identify. We do have remains. We're willing to ship. The rules say we'll ship once. If you want a second shipment, well ship a second time. Just make sure that that is explained correctly to the next of kin, so that they can make the right decision on how they want to handle their grief and so forth.

Q. (1:04:50) Which your form did.

A. Which our form did.

Q. (1:04:55) What did you have to do? Did you have to send out the correct form to Mrs. Vauk and have her readdress the issue?

A. Yes, Sandy Bois, Mike Wardlaw sent a note out saying disregard this, hold it all back. We got the right form out there, but I'll address follow through later on. There are CACOs even as of yesterday that were, are still not aware of this partial remains disposition form. Yes. A lot of issue with follow through at the regional level, NDW level, essentially.

I don't know how I got off on this, but that was the biggest issue I think, you know, that did not get addressed properly through the command, was the disposition of partial remains. We had people asking for it and we raised it with PERS-6. It did not get addressed adequately at PERS-6 and it got addressed incorrectly, but and then of course, wrong information got to Vice Admiral Ryan and could have been a big embarrassment, but I don't think it was. So –

Q. (1:06:01) Can you explain –

A. The Army, you know, the Army, they're in the same office. They're listening to our phone calls and we're listening to theirs and all that and they're on the phone over there saying, "We don't know what General Van Alstyne's saying, but the Navy's ready to be shipping partial remains. Then I get a call from JFAC, "What are you doing?"

I'm saying, "I'm shipping partial remains."

They say, "Well, under what guise are you?"

I say, "Well, I have this form right here that I'm using."

They say, "Well, can you please fax the form to us." So we faxed up to JFAC and they looked at it and then the Army made up their form and then they started doing partial remains.

Q. (1:06:39) I just was going to ask how long did it take JFAC to know that you existed and for them to start calling you?

A. Eeeeh, probably five, six days. You know, it was probably three or four days before I knew there was an NI. Nah, probably three days before I knew there was an NI Command Center; all these different casualty centers.

Then all of a sudden I get this call from COMNAVRESFOR. They've got a casualty center down there. I go, "Whoa." And of course, I said, "Well, what are you dealing with?"

"Well, the reservists."

I said, "Well, who you got?" "Well, what about this person, this person and this person?"

Naval Reservist News had a long list of reservists, the *NRA* magazine. Well, I sent a little note in to Admiral Keith saying, "You know, your list is wrong." Admiral Keith is CACO for Admiral Flag and this is why, and he said you know, "I've been on the phone with you and emailing back and forth with you for days and weeks now, you know, I should have thought about asking you who we had as reservists before we published it."

So they had three errors in there. So it's—people—I would be carrying this list of fifty-five people and I would get call after call after call. "Where are you coming up with fifty-five?"

"We're only carrying forty-three."

Q. (1:08:00) Hum.

A. You know and I would start going down the list. Nobody can understand why we're carrying fifty-five people here. It was the difference. There were twelve people on the airplane, forty-three in the Pentagon. So it just—there's a lot of lack of communication, I guess I should say, thorough communications.

Q. (1:08:25) Was it difficult, I mean how did you even get, where you're set up how did you get connectivity to send your email?

A. Well, first off, nobody told me to bring anything. I just happened to bring my—fortunately I have a Navy laptop, so I brought it. Fortunately, Master Chief Bond had a laptop with him. We got into that office there. There wasn't even a telephone in there. Then it was—took an act of Congress to convince them we needed a second telephone in there. And then we had to have more phone lines brought in there, because we had to be connected to modems at the same time we needed the telephones. We convinced them to get us a copier. The Navy authorized us to go out and buy a fax machine. Mr. Tocchetti would not allow us to put a fax machine in there. Would not allow it.

I said, "OK, I've won some battles, I'll lose this battle." It's been painful, but—because he wanted to make sure he got, he got insided to every fax that came in before we did, to the expense of sometimes we had to track down faxes that were faxable. No, I picked and choosed some of the battles, and that one I said, "OK I'm not going to tick him off too much, and go ahead," because I could have just put a fax machine in, but it would have tied up one of the phone lines. I would not have gotten an extra phone line in there.

So, it took quite a while just to get things, you know, set up in there, and convince people that we were here to stay and we had some work to do. Full support, that, you know, it's fortunate the Master Chief had, what do you call a card, a credit card?

Q. (1:10:23) Government credit card?

A. No, it's a supply credit card

Q. (1:10:24) Oh, the credit card.

A. Fortunately, he had one, because he called up and he called down to PERS-6 and they said buy whatever you need. He would go out, he went out to Staples and bought all sorts of stuff, thousands of dollars. And then, of course, we had to spend thousands and thousands of dollars on uniform items and everything. So it's a good thing we had that.

Logistics, there were some, you know, I have a recommendation that we should have a PERS-6 Naval Casualty flyaway kit, you know, and a list of things that ought to be in that so they can just ship it, you know, over night to Port Mortuary. Everything's here and then the other recommendation which people here support are having a Navy, and Army, and Air Force office in the back of the mortuary set up and all that, so hopefully that will get the support it needs. So if we ever have something like this again we—it's obviously much better, I don't really want to be in the back of the mortuary.

You guys weren't exposed to it, but the distinct smell, I can sit here before you and say the smell still hasn't gone away. I smell it all the time. Very, very, very strong acrid distinct, you know, you don't smell anywhere else.

So I wish, I hope the offices aren't put in the back of the mortuary, because I wouldn't want to be back there twelve hours a day. Very, very—I still smell it, so.

Q. (1:12:08) Could you tell us a little bit about the follow through you eluded to earlier?

A. We're learning even as late as yesterday, the day before, last week, as we're dealing with the CACO. We never, we never went to the CACO. CACO came to us. The process was once a person was identified, we would let Navy Comm Cell know and they would let the regional and regional would inform the CACO, OK. And, that's fine. We were accused once of getting into, getting, inserting ourselves in the process. I said, "Absolutely not. We never have initiated a call to CACO." We let the identification process go through official channels. We wait for the

CACO to call us. So when we'd get the calls from the CACOs, we would start going through our check list and advising them of options and conditions of remains and so forth. Well, even as late as, you know, weeks into this, we would ask CACOs, "OK, do you have the disposition form?" "What is that?"

OK, "Well, that's something that was provided in the very first couple of days." CACOs didn't have it. "Do you have the form next of kin can request partial remains?"

"What do you mean by that?" They hadn't been brief on it. They didn't have the form. We need the Virginia Death Certificate information. They didn't have the form for that. They had never been requested that, and I'll talk about the Death Certificate a little bit later, if you remind me. The, what I called, what I referred to as follow through, is I have it in my mind that in the process of notify, of notification, in the process of establishing all these procedures of this disposition form, the partial remains, Death Certificate, autopsy reports, information that we went out and obtained, collected and put in a way, you know, and wrote up in a way that it should be given to the CACOs and the CACOs can inform the next of kin, and be proactive, rather than waiting. Oh yes, autopsy report. So next of kin will say, "Mr. CACO, when am I going to get the autopsy report?"

Well, they could have already provided that information on what the process was, because it was out there for a week, two weeks earlier. So when I referred to follow through that it didn't seem to me that there was an effort at the regional effort to track every CACO in what they had told every CACO, or in the last time the CACO called in, or the last time the CACO came in to pick up information, and if it gone too long, why didn't they contact the CACO and get this information to the CACO. I don't care if it was overnight express. I don't care if it was fax, whatever, email. Most of this was available electronically. There was no follow through on that.

We would take calls from CACOs weeks into this that had no knowledge of any of these policies, procedures, processes or anything. Because I would sit there and ask—they started asking me questions and I would say, ‘Just out of curiosity have you been provided this or this?’ ‘No, I never heard of it.’

It’s been out there for two weeks, and we still get those calls last week and this week. And that to me is not serving the next of kin adequately. From the standpoint of death certificate, letting them know about partial remains.

Q. (1:15:57) Can you tell them where the break in the chain is? If you’re sending the information out, can you tell where it’s stopping?

A. At the beginning, Navy Comm Cell. And I’m not here to bash reservists, but there was lack of continuity in Navy Comm Cell and it was manned by reservists. Ok? I think there was a lack of leadership with the Navy Comm Cell personnel, initially. There right now we’ve got some great reservists working down there. Lt. Comdr. Miller, Comdr. Everson, Lt. Comdr. Rossi, but at the outset the leadership wasn’t there. I don’t think they were given the, I don’t think they intuitively had the where with all to say this is important information to go to CACOs and Regional because they didn’t understand the process, or where to fit into the process. Because I would wait twelve hours or twenty-four hours, I would send an email back saying, “I haven’t seen any action on this.” And all of a sudden it would dawn on somebody down there that they had an action. It was very clearly in the SITREP that they had an action the night before. So I think there was a little bit lack of leadership down there.

Now this is just my perspective. I could be wrong, but.....

Q. (1:17:20) Right, are they physically in Millington?

A. Yes, there's a reserve unit that supports PERS-6. Captain Phil Altizer (phonetic) is the CO of that unit. I spoke to him several times and there was just a, I think it was a stream of IDTs and ATs and ADTs and everything else just--- You had a lot of folks coming in there and working, but I think it lacked leadership and continuity, and basic training and understanding of what this whole casualty business was about, which I was learning on the go, hour by hour.

The second part is information that was, I know in fact, forwarded on to the regionals, like NDW Casualty Center. That's where I don't think there was this—What I would, what I would have done was maintaining and tracking every CACO and what is provided every CACO. So that they understood and could be providing information to the next of kin.

There are many next of kin, who I'm even convinced today—not many some—who probably still don't understand partial remains process. And, I would provide, every week now for the last five or six weeks, I provided a thorough overview of the status of remains. Where are we in the investigation? At no time do I feel it's my part or anybody's part to encourage a next of kin to accept partial remains. That's their business. I don't want to encourage them, but I want them to have the correct information as today. That is definitely not being followed through.

A CACO came and visited us a couple of days ago and he said, you know, I didn't ask him, "Why are you here?" You know, in a round about way he probably realized I was wondering why he was here. He says, "I came down here to get the straight information."

Well he could have picked up the phone, or emailed or anything, but, and I said, "Well, what do you mean?"

He said, "Well, you know, I asked Barbara MacDonald what the status of the remains is, and quote, unquote, all she said was, "They're still on forensic hold."

Well, that's a bunch of crap, OK. They're not on forensic hold. Nobody's on hold. They're not releasable because there could be other remains out there. Well, look this CACO really didn't understand that he should be proactively advising his next of kin what her options were. Doesn't understand it. Barbara MacDonald, the Regional Coordinator for NDW has been telling people, "Well, their still on forensic hold." That's not what you tell people. I wrote up this fifteen lines. Every CACO should be reading those fifteen lines of what the exact status was. For I'm saying that we have so many remains left. The medical examiner just took seventy new samples of those remains. In the grand scheme of things, we only have five people who have not been identified. So some of those seventy remains may belong to those five people. They may not. They may belong to the other hundred and seventy-eight, well, hundred and forty some odd that were not in tact.

So I said, "In the last in that last week, we have had this many of the remains re-associated with other previously identified remains. What I'm trying to set the stage is that the likelihood of there being something else to re-associate with so and so is very small. We've only had in the last week, one identification, two additional remains re-associated. In all likelihood there isn't anything there, but there could be, you know.

Probability and possibility is what I'm dealing with here. But I think that should be conveyed to the next of kin. We're coming up to the holidays. You know, do they want to have an extended grief through Thanksgiving, through Christmas. Do they want to get it over with? You know, I don't know the next of kin to know what their state of mind is, but I think they ought to have the information. That information was not being followed through on. The CACOs were not conveying that to the next of kin.

Q. (1:21:50) Did you kind examples of that through out the Regions or was it more specific, throughout the system, I guess?

A. Well, the far majority is ending up—I have not actually gone down the list to see if the next of kin is in another region, There area few, but to be very honest, I think it's like ninety to ninety-five percent are NDW. Now I got an email from Rear Admiral Keith, he's the CACO for Rear Admiral and Mrs. Flag, who were on the airplane. Somehow he found out that we had this Navy liaison office out here. So he sent me an email. He said, "Please give me a call."

So, of course I called him. Admiral Keith was the Commander in Naval Air Reserve Force, prior to Admiral McGlocklan (phonetic) who now works for NRA.

He starts asking questions and everything else and I'm giving him answers to almost everything. He said, "You know, this has been real good. You know, I don't hear anything. I don't get any information." OK. That's when I started realizing what little information is being proactively being forwarded out to the CACOs. He did have a disposition form. He didn't understand about the death certificate. He knew nothing about partial remains. So I emailed the form to him, and so now we have had a weekly email exchange where, and phone calls, where he now feels that he's getting the right information, because he goes out weekly to meet with the two sons of the Flags. He gives them an update. So he wants to know exactly where we are.

All the information I've been giving out week by week has not been getting out to the CACOs.

Q. (1:23:53) And you've been giving out that information to NDW? To make that –

A. To Navy Comm Cell, OK, and navy Comm Cell has been forwarding it out to the regions.

Q. (1:24:01) To the regions, OK. Have you had any direct contact with the regional coordinators, or –

A. One phone call with Barbara MacDonald. Here once again, I'm trying to adhere to chain of command. I'm not trying to be pigheaded about it, but I'm trying, you know, I'm responsible to PERS-6. I'm more than willing to talk to anybody out there, but I'm not going to, I don't want to jump over chain of command.

Obviously we've spoken to every CACO. Even to Petty Officer Hemenway's and Mr. Lynch's CACOs, but it's very clear when the CACOs call that they, in some cases they're clueless of what's going on. That's been very frustrating.

Q. (1:24:50) For you to understand their responsibilities did you get a copy of the instruction covering them, or how did you get smart on that project?

A. Is there a CACO instruction?

Q. (1:25:00) I don't know. I guess that's what I'm asking.

A. I don't know.

Q. (1:25:03) So you don't know what sort of—I think there must be,

A. I suspect there is some, some, because we've been doing CACO for a long time and if we do it great.

Q. (1:25:08) Right, this is not the first time.

A. You know, now here I am bringing up these issues and being somewhat negative about certain things. I've been home a couple times. I've run into people. People have been to memorial services, to funerals. People have been very close to the next of kin and everything else. And to the letter, to the letter, there isn't one person that said anything negative about this whole process. I mean they are so appreciative. Comments that, I've gotten comments about the uniform. You know, they didn't even know that I had anything to do with this out here, and I come back to the Master Chief and said, I ran into so and so and the family that met me, the wife,

the father or whatever were so appreciative that so much attention was paid to the uniform to the awards. Just everything, so you know, it's working. Could it have worked better? Yes. Could we possibly have, could a next of kin have said, "I want partial remains," because she or he had more information than they currently have? Probably. I'm convinced of that, but all in all the families have been very, very appreciative of how, what a fine job these CACOs have done. And that's why I—I was guest speaker at a change of command a few weeks ago. I went back to DC for that, and one of the CACOs was in the audience, a Lt. Comdr. Al DeMedeiros, he's the XO over at the Reserve Center, Washington. He's the CACO for Captain Burlingame. And I didn't spend much time talking about my experiences here, but I did spend two or three minutes on it. But I did mention in there, you know, I have the highest respect for the CACOs. I remember when I was in Singapore. We were transiting from Okinawa while we were on deployment to Diego Garcia for a couple of months, and we went through the Philippines and then we had to stop at Singapore for an overnight. We were in Singapore for a—in the Intercontinental Hotel. I think we had been in there ten minutes just checking in and all of a sudden I get a phone call. One of our flight engineers had fallen off the balcony onto the deck below. You know, so my only experience with handling a casualty was that. I was a young LTjg and this was eight stories up.

The kid was nineteen years old; not married. A wonderful guy, absolutely wonderful. The only problem was he was tall and in Singapore balcony railings are lower, and he went to sit back on the, lean back against the balcony and fell over and died forty-five minutes later.

So as the plane commander, I was the second pilot, went with him, because he was still alive when he was being transported out to the hospital. I was dealing with the embassy and the hotel staff. The hotel's accusing us of having been drunk and everything else. We'd been there ten

minutes. He had an apple juice in his hand. You know, all these different things, and that was my only experience with casualty and then having, helping write the letter on what happened, because the parents just couldn't understand. How come my young nineteen year old just joined the Navy. He's an E-4 and blah, blah blah.

So my only experience was that minimal exposure to having to understand what was going through a family's mind and all the arrangements associated with a navy death. These guys, these CACOs have done a phenomenal job.

Lt. [REDACTED], and I don't want to criticize a next of kin, but she wanted fly over, she wanted caissons, twenty-one gun salute. You know, all these things that these CACOs have had to deal with and do it very sensitively and compassionately, and in a very positive way with the family. They have the tough job. They're the one that has to look the next of kin in the eye and tell them about the status of remains and why your loved one hasn't been identified yet. I haven't had to do that with the next of kin. They're the ones that have done a banner job of making the next of kin appreciative at the end of everything that's done. So they've had a tough job.

Q. (1:30:14) We're kind of getting close to the end of our time. Did you want to tell us something about the death certificates?

A. Oh, -

Q. (1:30:22) Let me change the tape real quick.

A. With the death certificates you get into a lot of details and this is an instance where somebody probably didn't understand how important accuracy was. You're actually sending information to the Registrar of Vital Statistic for the State of Virginia. Correcting that is an act of Congress, you know. So you want to make sure everything goes in accurately. But we didn't realize, you know, we had to initiate this through PERS-6. There was nothing—all of a sudden—by state law once a

person is identified as a deceased, the death certificates supposed to be issued within five days, by state law. OK. Well, that was violated here. So we start getting identifications in and we're asking PERS-6 what's being done about death certificates, and the question comes back, "What are you talking about?"

So we provided a Virginia Death Certificate down to PERS-6 saying we need this information, accurate, filled out on every Navy case immediately. So they went ahead and they developed a form to be filled out and they sent that form off to the regionals. We didn't even know about this. We didn't see any reason why they couldn't just send the death certificate form to fill out. But they made up a form and they expected the, that we would get all these things back within, you know, twenty-four to forty-eight hours.

What it turned out was that these forms went to the regionals, and we didn't realize this until we were on the phone with a CACO and I told the CACO, I said, "Well, I had the death certificates."

He said, "Well, how did you get the death certificate information?"

I said, "Well, didn't you fill it out?"

He said, "I've never even seen this. I do not know anything about death certificates."

So I pull out the form, and of course, it's sent to me by NDW Casualty. I picked up another file and pulled out the form and I'm looking at the handwriting. It's all the same, and every file I opened up, the handwriting was all the same. What somebody had done was fill out all the information based on their spreadsheet of information on the decedent. And there was a lot of inaccurate information. This needed to be—to go through the CACO. The CACO to sit down with the next of kin and that's not a pleasant thing to do, but you really have to fill it out. It wasn't done. NDW Casualty went ahead and did it all themselves based on the information they

had, and sent it back to us. That then became the death certificate information that we turned in, that went down to the Registrar.

And we got some calls last week from next of kin. ‘That’s wonderful, we received the death certificates in the mail, but they’re wrong.’ So, to me that was an oversight on not understanding that this had to be exact. Because now we have to go in and issue a correction to this death certificate. Get it through the Registrar down in Richmond and then get it back and sent back out to the next of kin, a disservice to the next of kin. And that’s what we’re trying to avoid, you know.

You want to minimize the number of times you have to contact the next of kin. At least from my perspective, you know. So that’s what I’m going to talk about, death certificates.

Q. (1:34:26) Can you tell us the—what is the partial remains process? The options?

A. OK. A next of kin can have the option of accepting partial remains and it would be the remains that we have on hand that have been identified as belonging to that decedent at the time that they have requested shipment. I mention that because between the time that they request the partial remains and the time that they decide they want shipped, can be a couple of days. In the case of cremains it becomes even more critical, because another body part could be identified to that set of remains in that couple day period. And so we reopen the packet and we put the additional remains in there.

It becomes even more important with cremains because you need an extra twenty-four to forty-eight hours to cremate the remains before you ship them, because you have to send it out to another, to a crematory. They cremate; they bring them back. In that two day period another piece of remains could show up. Well, that’s not going to be cremated at that point in time. So

we're going to cremate based upon the disposition form at the time we have to send the cremation out.

The options the family has, there's three options. The first option is I don't care to know that there are any additional remains. They belong to the Navy. And when that is explained to the next of kin, it should be explained in such a way, the Navy will go ahead and do a complete cremation, and that the cremains will then be disposed like any other medical specimen, see. All right, so that's option one. Option two is, I would like a second delivery and the Navy will pay for the second delivery. There's two parts to that option. Two A is cremains, I want a second set of cremains sent to me in an urn, or casket for burial. The third is I don't know what I want to do, but contact me if you find additional remains.

So we've recorded for every partial that we have had, we have recorded what the disposition request is by the next of kin, and then we've recorded each new remain that has been re-associated with that since the original. So that when it comes to the point of, of finally dispositioning those remains in the case of where the— we have ten families; we're in for the long haul. They don't want to accept partial remains. So we can account and make sure they are all re-associated and the case is then—when the investigation is determined complete, we can then go back to those next of kin and say we do have additional remains. What do you want do, or whatever.

Now that whole process is going to be handled a little bit differently apparently, tomorrow morning. What I understand now, is that every family is going to be contacted tomorrow morning to let them know that the investigation is complete. There will be an announcement on Friday afternoon to that affect.

So in a case of where a person, a next of kin has accepted partial remains, and elected option one, I don't care to know, they're going to have the opportunity to ask the question tomorrow, and they will. You know even though they said, "I don't care," they're going to ask. By the way did anymore remains show up on my husband or my wife or whatever? So they're going to ask. So that's the work we have today is to get that information. I don't want that, I don't want to provide that information to Navy Comm Cell. Navy Comm to go to regional. Regional down to CACO by tomorrow morning and get convoluted. I think that information should go directly from us to the CACO. So CACO fully understands, you know, how many pieces we have. What the disposition that the next of kin has elected and be prepared for the questions tomorrow morning. Because we have, you know, we have thirty-two that have indicated partial remains and their going to get questioned on all thirty-two of those. Some there's none, some there is and so forth.

Then the option three, we should be resolved tomorrow morning. Why contact them again on Monday and say, "OK, you indicated option three. What do you want to do now?" Well, they should know tomorrow morning, so that they can say the investigations complete. You've elected option three. We have such and such remains. What do you want us to do? That is going to be a little bit of work, a lot of work on that today.

Q. (1:39:32) What about the terrorists?

A. OK.

Q. (1:39:39) The bodies of the terrorists?

A. It's believed that there were either four to five hijackers on the airplane. This is all unofficial. What I've learned from the FBI is that they have remains that they believe are associated with the size, you know bone makeup, size and so forth of what these terrorists would normally be.

You know, Southwest Asian and Middle Eastern. I don't know how many, but they think they have. You know, right now there's only one civilian on the airliner who has not been identified. But in some cases of some of the civilians, some of the people on the airliner, all we have is this. One person I know is all we have is this.

Q. (1:40:29) Is what?

A. Oh, excuse me. Is a half of a finger, and the only way they identified that person was from the fingerprint. And it's an interesting pro—do you want me to go into this?

Q. (1:40:39) Yes.

A. And this came in very late, so it'd been in the ashes for a long period of time and burned extensively. Decomposed. They couldn't get a fingerprint off it. So what they do is they cut the tissue off the fingerprint and they roll that tissue onto their own finger and they roll a fingerprint from that. Because this is too hard and everything else, they cannot do a fingerprint off of them. That's how they identified one of the people off the airliner. So that's only one person, so surprising to all of them—you know, I heard early on from Captain Wagner and others that they're not going to—they'll be lucky if I end up identifying anyone on the airliner. Well, they've all been very surprised that there had been enough tissues and pieces to identify all but one person.

So I have to suspect that they probably do have all four or five of the hijackers. I to this day still don't know whether it's four or five. I don't know if that questions still up in the air in the media or what, I don't know.

So I suspect they probably do have something, what they believe is something, on all four or five, but until they can really identify each person, because you know, with the hijackers, they don't have DNA. They don't have fingerprints on file, more than likely. There's nobody out

there claiming them. Nobody sending in medical or dental records on them. So all they have is a known photograph and of course, in this case photographs are not of any value at all. So you know, I guess I get into this, should I call anthropology, where they try and create what a body would—I don't know, I don't understand it all, but somebody here might, but you know, there are a lot of anthropologists on this medical team, too. Put histories together and understand exactly what could have happened and who this might be and so forth.

Interestingly, which I didn't mention before in the process of identifying people, the—you know, we're out trying to scavenge for medical records and dental records. I mean we've spent the better part of the first ten days, just all our time on that, you know, because that was so critical for the process.

You could not assume, one, a person had DNA on file. In the case of civilians more than likely he didn't. You couldn't assume that you are going to have a good tissue sample for DNA. You couldn't assume you could have fingerprints. You know DNA, fingerprinting are the two classic methods of, or easiest methods of identification. Next is dental. But you know a lot of civilians, you know, where are the medical-dental records. Do civilians have panorex? Well, you might say well, OK, well that's a civilian's role. You don't know who, you don't know what you're dealing with. You've got all these remains. You don't know if it's a Navy active duty, an Army active duty, a civilian, you know. You don't know to try to make all these different matches. So finding medical-dental records was a huge, huge effort.

Then in the case of those some folks who are now civilians who were prior military, going back and getting their military record in addition to their civilian dental and medical records, there's a lot of effort involved in that.

It became pretty clear that we weren't going to get records on everybody. So the next question came out about major surgeries and bone fractures, because, you know, if they had a bone in their hand and if there was a record of somebody having broken a femur or whatever that might have been the key information to identify someone.

So all the people that we didn't have medical and dental records, and who aren't yet, not yet identified went out for request to the family. Once again, CACOs need to go to the family and ask did so and so ever have any major surgeries or major bone fractures. They had to be pretty significant in order to be, to help the process.

This was all prompted by the fact we had a torso, and Dr. Reiner (phonetic) was saying, you know, we have this torso back there, and through the autopsy was clear that it had a heart by-pass recently. And yet no medical records show a heart by-pass recently. Who is this person?

So, you know, to this day I don't know if that's the one person that hasn't been identified. I don't think so, but I don't know, but I am convinced that that major, you know, bone fracture, major surgery information was a key in identifying a couple of people, couple of Navy people. So it helps.

I don't know how I got off on that tangent.

Q. (1:45:25) Have you talked to any family members, or have you had to distance yourself from them?

A. No, I haven't had to. I've always offered to CACOs saying if at anytime you want us to talk to a family member, by all means we'll be happy to do that. I say, I don't think that's—I said, "The only caution with that is that we don't have a full understanding of the history of that person, and you're the one that's looking them in the eye. You understand their level of grief. It's not advisable that we talk, that I talk to them, but if it's necessary I will."

I also would advise them, saying, if the family member wants to ask me about the specific extent of the remains, what parts we have, that the CACO either needs to be present, provide the minister be there, or somebody that's very close to this person, because they're not going to like, not going to want to hear what they're going to hear. Then I'll do that.

In the case of Brady Howell, I had the father call me and one other family. Can't remember who it was right now. So only two family members have I spoken to. And that's fine.

Q. (1:46:44) What did you learn when you went to the Pentagon and toured the crime scene?

A. I think the—you hear a lot—all we really ever knew was what we saw on television at night when we went back to the billeting. You know, you'd see pictures and you'd hear stories and all that, but getting it from the perspective of an agent that had been involved in accidents, and crashes and attacks and casualty affairs before kind of put it in a much better perspective of how violent the impact was. Where it hit. Why you had an explosion like we did. Why we had the intense fire. Why it took so long to put the fire out. What happens to bodies in those fires, you know, you have a crematory, bones pulverize. All those things to understand why we're seeing what we're seeing coming in thought the—in the pouches. And why this identification process is so difficult.

To see all the rubble that was out in the North Parking lot, yes North Parking lot and knowing, you know, how critical it was that these dogs, these dogs, go through all this rubble. They're the ones that get the credit for identifying all these people, because they would pick out small pieces of tissue. There were pouches where, you know a piece of bone this big, a small piece of a finger and things of that nature that probably made a difference in identifying people.

So just understanding, you know, the situation of where these people were. Why we have some smoke inhalation victims. And that's one of the fathers I had to talk to. It was at—here their son

was, died of smoke inhalation. It's a shame. He just didn't get out in time and died of smoke inhalation and burned after that. It's a shame, you know, it's not like the plane came in and, you know, crashed right on him. He just for some reason couldn't get out.

And in talking to—I know Master Chief talked to you about the one LTjg (Editors Note: reference is to LTjg McKeown) who came in as escort, who'd actually been in there and escaped through a hole, and she was a wonderful person. I—I—When she came here, I knew ahead of time who it was that was coming and so I had one of the Chaplains there. I said, “Chaplain, “ I said, “Don't leave her side.” She's here, and you know, when I saw her I thought she was a basket case. Didn't look like she'd slept in months.

Anyway, now I'm not going to question why she decided to do that. I would not have advised it if I was her commanding officer, but in retrospect having listened to your response yesterday, I can understand that. That she needed that.

Well she called the next day after she got to Kansas or, I think Kentucky, and just checked in and I asked her, I said, “How you doing?”

She said, “I'm doing OK.” She said, “I need this.”

I said, “OK, good.” Then she called after the funeral again and I spoke to her and you know here's a person who just needed to talk, you know. She was very appreciative of all of the support.

You know, we're just doing our job here. That's really all we're doing, and we're here to serve the families and the CACOs and so forth, and, but, you know, it was obvious why she decided to do this and that she needed to do it. She was very appreciative of everyone who supported her along the way. And you know, I give a lot of credit to the Master Chief for that because he really took good care of her when she was here.

How'd I get off on that tangent. I can't remember, but we received a lot of feedback that families appreciate this, and they know at the time of burial that there is a Navy family behind them and you know, we're all part of that.

I sent a note off to one of the reserve unit COs who had lost a couple of folks, because I had, all the for the most part, the escorts were being provided by the command. NCTS is a good example, under Lt. Comdr. Davis. She had put together a list of escorts for us, for all the folks out of the N6 area. And to me that would be most meaningful to the families, as you escort the remains, because you knew the person. You could tell the family what a wonderful job he or she had done, blah, blah, blah. Well, that wasn't happening with N3, N5, and they had a lot of victims. And I sent a note off to the CO, and I said, "You know, I may be out of line, but I'll just share my observation and why," and I did. Never got any response and so the escorts for all those folks were pulled out of Main, Connecticut, Massachusetts. Fine people, they were more than happy to do this. Chiefs, junior officers, chaplains, great group of escorts that came down and escorted all these remains to the funeral homes and next of kin and so forth. Got a little bit impersonal. So I don't know, I'm not sure why the decision was made to do it that way, but that's the way it was. I tried to politely interject and provide my advice, but for whatever reason it wasn't taken.

Q. (1:53:25) Was that just on the reserve side or was that also on the active duty side?

A. I just did it on the reserve side. Hoping it would flow over to the active duty.

Q. (1:53:32) Because the active duty side as well, people who were escorting the bodies were not –

A. Yes, N3/N5, their folks were all, victims were all escorted by people from the Northeast Region.

Q. (1:53:32) Is there anything in your background, between your past experience that prepared you for what you were able to do up here?

A. In retrospect yes. I—probably several different things. I’m the youngest in my family and you know, my father died in 1995, and that took me by surprise, you know. He had been going through lung cancer, but he had been kicking it and I thought he was all well and fine, and then he just went down hill in a matter of about a week and a half. So I had gone through a, you know, funeral, and I’m the one that provided the honors.

That was an interesting experience. Here he is a World War II vet, Army Air Corps. Couldn’t get anyone to come and do honors at the funeral.

Q. (1:54:52) Where was it?

A. It was in Leesburg, Virginia. I was on the phone for a week, about a week, you know, because it looked like he was going down hill Trying to find out what to do and then for two days solid on the phone and I couldn’t get anybody to do anything, but, with the people I know now, I probably could have made it happen, but you know.

But anyway, so I’m the one who did the honors. Folding the flag and presented it to my mother, and I spoke at the funeral and all those kinds of things. So that was probably the—that was certainly the closest person to me that ever died, and he lived a good life and probably knew that he was going to die sooner than he probably should, but he smoked two packs a day all his life. I’m not down on smokers, but me and my mother, my mother’s now eighty. She’ll be eighty this year. She smoked two packs a day, too, so.

But anyway, so you know, I had a little bit of exposure to death, to the funeral, even a little bit of a glimpse into military honors, which was very frustrating at the time. The—and I’ve had a few

other aunts and uncles died, you know, everybody's dying right now so I've been to a lot of funerals in the last few years.

But, you know, from a personal perspective, you know, I have this understanding of life and death that might be not quite as much accepted by the general populace. But to me there's joy in death. Death is a reality. We're all going to die, and I think we're all, each of us are here for a specific reason, for a specific period of time on this earth.

I'm not going to try and justify why a hundred and eighty-three people were killed in the Pentagon, or thousands up at the World Trade Center, and I certainly don't think it's an unloving and uncaring God that's done this. There is a plan for this earthly existence and I could die tomorrow. Hopefully, I've lived my life in such a way that I'll be worthy of the things that are in store for me in an afterlife, and maybe I haven't and I'll, I'll certainly regret that should I die tomorrow. But, to me, I didn't cry when my father died. It probably bothers my sisters and my brother. I was very, very sad, because I would like to have spent more time with him, but I hadn't seen him in quite a while before he died. But, you know, it was the right time for him to go. He had been in some pain for sometime and was suffering, so naturally I implying it was good for him to go. But we're only here for a certain period of time, unfortunately.

Unfortunately, that three year old on an airplane, you know, she didn't, you know, didn't get to live a full life, or the eight year old or the three eleven year olds.

I think it's very, you know, I'm very saddened by that. There's a lot of joy in life. A lot of things to look forward to. The three eleven years, you know, had just won a contest and were going out to do some geography and so forth on the Channel Islands. You know, think of the joy being on an airplane.

Reginald Brown, had never been on an airplane before. Chief Brown had dropped them off, you know, at the airport and said goodbye to them.

There's a lot of sadness. There's no question about that. Don't get me wrong, but there is joy in death in knowing that, from my perspective knowing that we have a creator. We have a father in heaven and that we're going to be with him again in an afterlife, and knowing that these hundred and eighty-three people if they've lived their life in a way that's worthy of that that there is, they are having joy today.

So that kind of perspective I think, has helped me emotionally, I think, in the last eight weeks. I know there are a lot of people grieving, and a lot of sadness out there, but, you know, there's—when my father died I, you know, I felt some joy that I know he's lived a good life and I hope that some of these other families have kind of a similar understanding that even though they would like to have spent more time with their husband or wife or son or daughter that, that there's a reason for it. There's a meaning in our, in our, there's a purpose in our life—and we each are here for a certain period of time.

It was—I received, you know—we've all seen tons and tons of emails, you know, for the last couple of months. And I mentioned this when I was the guest speaker at that change of command a few weeks ago (speaker needs time to regain composure) We need to pray for the families.

There's thousands of people in New York that will essentially grieve forever over this, because they have no closure. They will never have their loved one identified. They will never have something to bury. There are probably a lot of people who are very bitter about all this. They will—can't understand why they can't just go, you know, annihilate Afghanistan or whatever it might be. I'm sure there's a lot of bitterness.

What I said at this change of command in addition to that was (speaker again regains composure) you know, just like his father went off on an appointment. He said goodbye, one day. His family had a belief that their father was going to be home in a certain period of time. Well on September 11th we each left home, most of us leave home, you know, early in the morning, may not even see our spouses or children, you know, because the other spouse or whatever might be taking care of them that morning and getting them off to school, or whatever it might be, but there are thousand's of people out there who one way or another left their loved ones on the morning of September 11th and never came home.

You know, there's a—we need to treat each day as a separate day and we need to realize that we could have been in the Pentagon. You know, we drive cars in a lot of traffic everyday. People are killed in DC, almost every day. We're here for a particular purpose. We're here for a particular period of time, and that day might be the day that is the end for us, and so when it comes to our spouses and our children, we need to make sure that we treat them the right way. We need to make sure we hug them, make sure that they know that we love them, because we may not come home that night or when we come home that night, they may not be there.

Not sure why, you know, I—you know, it just puts a whole new perspective. You know, it's one thing to think that your son or daughter, husband or wife's going to go off to war, Southwest Asian, Bosnia or whatever, and there's that risk they may not come home. Well, that risk is in our back door right now, in our front yard. A whole different perspective of thinking everybody needs to have.

Q. (2:05:27) What's the key thing you've learned about Steve O'Brien through these last six to eight weeks?

A. I gradually learned a lot more about this over the last couple of years due to other reason, too, but, compassion. Two years ago I probably had very little compassion and I've learned a lot through some church activities the last couple of years that have really impressed on me that there are a lot of people suffering for a lot of different reasons. And, even though I have problems in my life, I need to understand to be more compassionate to others. There are times when other people need me for one reason or another.

I think having had an experience, many experiences over the last couple of years in that area has helped me deal with this whole situation a lot better. And knowing what the families need. What the next of kin needed. Having appreciation for the work that the CACOs needed to do. I've—about my self, I've probably learned on the positive—well, I probably learned that I could be thrown into a, I'll call it a crisis situation, an unknown situation and I can pull together what the essential elements are and to get the wheels set into motion. I guess that's why I was sent here. I've learned that I probably should put my personal affairs in a little bit better order, because there's so many things my wife doesn't know where they are; what they are, and she ought to. It makes life a lot easier, and like I said last night, I don't say that very jokingly, I told her, I said, you know, "I've seen what's happened now for a lot of these families, and there's from my perspective"—now we had a couple of Orthodox Jews, but there were victims, and it's very important in that faith to have a full body to bury. I had to let the CACOs know that we could not stop an autopsy on those bodies, because in that faith you don't want to do—you don't do an autopsy. Well, it had to be done, and so, I told the CACOs only tell those families if they ask. Do share it with them, you know, but from my perspective, you know, the body just has to be an encasement for our spirits, our souls and our minds, and our conscience. So if I get blown up to pieces, don't worry about all the pieces. Just take something and bury it and be done with it.

So that's another thing I learned, and I laugh about it, but that's you know, that's my perspective on it and there's no need to drag it out to try and get body parts.

I also learned that a lot of people hold cremation very important and an interesting, at least for all the people we've shipped home, nobody has indicated there's been any donors. I'm not a personal supporter of donating organs and so forth, but if the people really didn't understand what the conditions were, they would have suggested, you know, getting the body and donating parts of body. Of course, only in a couple of cases were there any parts that were of any value. And of course, the bodies weren't even available quick enough to probably make a donation, eyes or whatever possible.

But, I'm just rambling right now for some reason.

What did I learn? I had absolutely no concept of what happens to the human body in an accident like this. You know, I saw a body pulled out of the reservoir behind my house. The person had drowned, and I was pretty shocked at the color of that body and how stiff it was in just a short period of time, and you know, so I've seen less than perfect conditions for somebody dying. You know, my father died on a hospital bed, so, with tubes in him, but I just didn't understand this. So, you know, on one hand, I learned that, you know, and interesting this past weekend I went home. Master Chief Bond held down the fort here, and a very interesting experience happened. My wife and I were in the car at a traffic light and all of a sudden she said, 'Oh no! Oh no!' and on the third "Oh no," I started, I heard the crash and I saw this pickup truck tumbling had he tumbled one more time, it would have been over the top of our car. The car stopped tumbling, and it slid right past our car. It stopped. So I get out.

Well, in that whole tumble experience, you know, you hear about, "Private Ryan," the fog of war, it was all in slow motions. It was like for two minutes that thing tumbled and tumbled in my

mind and I'm sitting there wondering, you know, is it going to hit us, because we couldn't get the car out of the way, because we had one right here and one right there.

But anyway as soon as it stopped, you know, I hopped out of the car and right away all these visions of all the carnage I've seen in the last eight weeks started flashing. This guys toast, or whoever is in the pickup truck. I didn't know what to expect and I ran over. You know, the car's on its belly, the pickup trucks is on its belly, crushed, and—I still have marks on my hands from the glass—and getting down there and looking at him and the guy looks fine. And of course he's saying, "Get me out of here! Get me out of here!"

I said, "There's no fire, no smoke. How's your back? How's your neck? How do you feel?" of course, if you're in shock everything feels fine anyway.

He's saying "Get me out of here! Get me out of here!"

So me and another guy by that time pulled him out. Not a scratch on his body. No airbags, don't know if he was belted in. Not a scratch. Not a—I had some blood on my fingers from having been on the ground on the glass, and not a scratch on him. And I was just very thankful that I didn't have to look at a broken up, bloodied, maybe dead body in there, or a child or whatever else, because at the same time when my wife was running out, she was hearing children in the other car that hit him, screaming. Fortunately, nobody was injured in there either. Airbags deployed and all that.

All of a sudden, you know, you deal with all this carnage and death over the last few weeks, and you have this, just this little small experience of another reality of, on the same morning when two hundred and sixty people die in an airplane up in Long Island, or in the Queens. You know, just this little experience of two cars hitting each other and thinking the worst. Fortunately, here is a case where the human body prevailed and withstood what I thought was a horrible crash.

I learned a lot about our bodies and it'd probably given me a better understanding that, yes, so the body, that's not what leaves us, you know. It's our spirit, and that's what leaves here and the bodies not that important. It might be pretty rude to say that, and I wouldn't if it was any of your next of kin, I certainly wouldn't be saying that in front of you, but that's just my perspective on it.

Q. (2:14:39) As this is winding down, what's next for you?

A. Oh, -

Q. (2:14:44) Next couple of months hold?

A. I suspect I'll be working on some kind of contingency battle planning or whatever for Admiral Weaver. Fortunately, you know, I did go back about a month ago when this first came up and met with a person in Naval District Washington, and got a full understanding of what Admiral Weaver wants, because we really thought I would have been back there a month ago to start working on it, and so I guess sometime I'll go back and do that.

Q. (2:15:11) And an out brief from here?

A. Oh, I'm sorry, that part. The flag officers—there was a proposal several years ago for a Flag Officer Casualty Advisory Board, (FOCAB) is what it's called, and it was agreed to that this was important, but they never really got it going, and this whole tragedy has emphasized to Admiral Ryan and other flag officers that they really need to convene this FOCAB and get it moving in the right direction so that should another mass casualty happen like this they know exactly how to deal with it.

So all the lessons learned from the different casualty centers and out here and all that will be consolidated and prepared for this advisory board that will meet either before Christmas or right after Christmas, probably right afterward.

So I'll be spending some time in Millington helping to pull that together.

Q. (2:16:10) Any idea what was driving that before this incident?

A. Probably some smart person saying, "Someday, you're going to have a mass casualty and we'd better have our act together." (Laugh) No, I don't know. But it was on paper, and there may even be an instruction or something out there. I don't know, but it was never convened. So they will probably convene it very quickly on September 11.

But I think really what the focus of this FOCAB will be is to pull together all the lessons learned and put some more processes in place so that we're ready for the, what I really think, inevitably there will be another one. You know, will it be all Navy and Army or will the Navy be excluded next time? Who knows, but-

Then I also probably will be asked to out brief Admiral Weaver, and that will probably be pretty interesting because I'll be a member of his command and I won't have—I mean there will be a lot of positive things, but there's some negative things that I think he's unaware of. It's all just to learn, you know, not to point real fingers, but just to make it better next time.

Q. (2:17:31) Is there anything else you want to leave for us on the record, historical record? Anything we didn't ask you about that we should have?

A. Yes, probably one other thing, yes, I'm glad you brought that up. One other thing that probably ought to be stressed. At no time, you know, there was a chaplain—I should say at no time—one of the chaplains from the Northeast Region that came down to escort, and there were several of them, and they, I think they all volunteered for this because being chaplains they probably had dealt with a lot of, you know, death counseling and so forth, and they knew how to handle this.

One of the chaplains took me aside and said, "Have you gone through CIS debrief?"

I said, "What are you talking about?" So he obviously knew I hadn't.

He said, "Well, you ought to go through this, you ought to get a CIS debrief review." He still didn't even tell me what CIS stood for. I didn't know what CIS stood for until a week before last when at our REDCOM COs Conference we had Dr. Sally Carryot (phonetic) who is currently right now up in New York doing grief counseling. That's what her expertise is. And she came and talked to all the Center and Unit COs. It was very, very good. And she took me aside and said that, she said, "You know you need some stress management decompression and things like that."

But I didn't even know what anybody was talking about. I guess there's this, you know, when you go through—I haven't, don't feel I've been personally traumatized. You know, I've been exposed to a lot of conditions that were a shock; absolutely shock me in a very short period of time. And there's been a lot of emotions that have been building up and creeping out of me over the last few weeks, but what's been emphasized as a team—you know, I guess when you do this Critical Incident Stress, which is what CIS stands for. I've heard Critical Incident Stress Management, Critical Incident Stress Debrief, decompression, all these different terms, you ought to go through as a team, because you really discuss things openly in a group. You bring a lot of things out that helps work through some of this post-trauma, which, once again, I don't believe I've gone through, but that's what the chaplains were here for. With all the groups that were going, and that were working back in the mortuary, all the reservists and the hundreds of people back there, were to counsel and then to work through all these things. At no time did they offer it to us, and I don't fault them for that, and maybe it was too early to even think about it. But, I've been advised that I need, and I need to do this in a leadership respect for Petty Officer Brown and Master Chief Bond and myself. So that's something I have to work on the next few

days to try and determine how we're going to go about doing that, because I'll have to trust—even though I don't think we need it, I have to trust people who are saying that we do, because they are the professionals. So I suspect we do need it.

So the lesson there is that one, you get put into a situation where you get exposed to a lot of carnage, there are things that happen to you emotionally and mentally that you don't even know about and if it wasn't for one or two people having mentioned this, I wouldn't even be thinking twice about it right now.

But I do know I don't sleep. I think I mentioned to you last night, I found myself one morning going over and over again in my mind the list of fifty-five people. Now, you know, I can go right down the list, you know – Barnes – Bishundat – Boyle - Caswell. I can go right down the list alphabetically of all seventy-five people. In some cases I know what their remains look like. I constantly have visions of two things in my mind, that's that little foot of the three year old, all black, and I think that's all we have of the three year old, and that's—to think that whole family, you know, lost in a minute.

That's why I don't blame people when they say, you know, let's go out and kill the bastards. I don't blame people for saying that, because I can understand where they're coming when I see that.

And I've been asked by CACOs and two families that I've spoken to—I guess one of the things that the families really like to know is did he or she suffer? Now when you think of an explosion and so forth, you know, people on the airplane probably didn't suffer at the time of the accident, but they knew something was going on for twelve minutes or whatever there. I just can't imagine the trauma and suffering that they were going through at that point in time. But, I have, I saw a head. I've seen, you know, a few heads. I saw one head in particular, a skull. All black with hair

that led me to believe it was a women, and I saw certain expressions in that mouth that would tell me forever that it was extreme, extreme fear and fright on some of those victims as they died.

That's how that person died. So I can't—you know to lie to somebody and say, no there probably wasn't any suffering because of the violence of the explosion and how quick it all happened and everything, but that's not true.

Die of smoke inhalation, you're suffering for a period of time, and we had several who died of smoke inhalation. Those autopsy reports aren't done yet. None of them are done and as soon as they put all the toxicology and lab and other findings together they may find that there were a considerable amount of people that died of smoke inhalation. And those families get those autopsy reports and that's another reason to pray for these families, because they're not going to get those for three months. All of a sudden they're going to get this autopsy report and they're going to read it. If they request it, of course, it's not automatic. They have to request it and that's when they're going to find out what parts they have. What parts they buried and what the person died of. Boy, oh boy, you know, that's going to be really traumatic for those next of kin to get those. And some of them have already requested. I know they're out there asking for it.

Well, I took too long now.

Q. (2:25:27) We want to thank you for taking time out of your—I know today is going to be a busy day.

A. Yes, yesterday wasn't busy at all, and today is going to be.

Q. (2:25:32) You've really given us a lot of good information sharing some incites that only you can provide. We really thank you. And for all you've done.

A. Well, thank you. A lot of people have thanked me over the last few weeks, you know, and I—there's no room for thanks you know it's just—we're out here doing our job and trying to do it in a way that's respectable.

It's a good thing Master Chief Bond was here because he could get into people's knickers and we needed to.

Q. (2:26:23) It was just kind of, you know, we hear a lot about the "Dream Team" and really when you think about it, this is kind of a Dream Team for one situation.

A. It worked out very, very well, and you know, and so we complemented each other very, very well.

Q. (2:26:42) I have to tell you, do you ever get the feeling like now you know why you were put on the earth?

A. You know –

Q. (2:26:50) I don't mean to make that sound—I mean, once you give—what you have done is so, such a gift to the rest of the Navy and to the rest of our country.

Q. (2:27:02) (Different interviewer) Those families.

Q. (2:27:09) (previous interviewer) it's almost like thank you God for giving me the opportunity to serve.

A. I do appreciate that, and Chief Luthi asked if anything prepared me for this, you know and I know there are. And I know that there's a reason why I offered that, "Hey, if there's anything you need me for I'll do it," not knowing what it was and how long it would be, and I know why, you know, I probably, you know, I didn't turn it down, because I felt that I could probably be put into an unknown situation and probably do a fairly decent job of pulling things together and make it happen.

So, I have to tell you, you know, when Master Chief Bond yesterday mentioned, you know, we reported in on Friday morning and Dr. Wagner, we reported into him and with out even batting an eye, he started taking us through the process. I was trying to be the tough guy and saying, “Ok, I guess I’m supposed to be here looking at all this.” Not knowing why. Now I know why I had to see all that, but—and deal with it for weeks, but it was a shock. I just couldn’t imagine, you know, I just can’t—never in my life, you know, I had to admit, you know, I’ve seen horrible, here and there, you know, how they make up corpses and things like that, but it was absolutely horrific, and to think there’s thousand of those up in New York,

Q. (2:29:07) Can you imagine what those people are going through?

A. So, sad. I appreciate the fact that I was asked to do this, and I know I will be better, I am better off for having been here. I haven’t decided what it is I should do with everything I’ve learned, in the future. You know the mechanics of Casualty Affairs is one thing, but the, you know, what you asked me is, you know, what is Steve O’Brien walking away with? I don’t know exactly, yet. I know some things, but there’s probably more to it.

CAPT Hall: Thank you, sir.