

**Naval Historical Center
Oral Interview Summary Form**

Interviewers:

CAPT Michael McDaniel
CAPT(sel) Carol O'Hagan

Interviewer's Organization:

Navy Historical Center
Navy Historical Center

Interviewee:

Kim Plyer

Current Address:

██████████
██████████

Date of Interview:

8 NOV 2001

Place of Interview:

Navy Annex

Number of Cassettes:

1

Security Classification:

UNCLAS

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

Abstract of Interview:

Interviewee Information: Kim Plyer is a contractor with the Navy's Chief of Information (CHINFO) involved in the P.R. aspects of the Common Access Card ("Smart Card"). She is a former Navy journalist who was stationed on a sub tender for four of her five years service. As a civilian, she worked in a number of P.R. jobs before coming to CHINFO. She comes from a military family: Her husband is in the Navy, stationed at NAS Pax River. Her father was in the Navy during World War II and one of her brothers, a Marine, was killed in Vietnam.

Interview Summary: On 11 September 2001 she was aware of the attacks on the World Trade Center when she arrived at the South parking lot of the Pentagon. She had just parked her car and was standing near it when she heard a noise that "sounded like the snapback . . . when the line pulls too tight [on a ship]." She looked up, saw the American Airlines plane flying so low she felt like "I could look up and touch it. She grabbed the arm of a security guard standing near her, saying "My God! That one's flying really low!" At that point the plane crashed into the Pentagon.

She said that in the moments before the plane crashed, she could make out the outlines of the passengers huddled in the rear of the plane. She said the plane "didn't hit like a missile . . . It kind of belly-flopped in [hit the ground first and balanced] . . . It was really bizarre because you kind of expect it to leapfrog and come out the other end. But it didn't . . . The next thing everything was smoke everywhere and I ran to my car and drove out the wrong way." On the way home she stopped to pick up groceries. But by the time she arrived home, she was so distraught she couldn't remember stopping at the store or buying the groceries.

Note that Ms. Plyler was the first person the interview team talked to who actually saw the plane. She says she saw it “perfectly.” She added that she heard the plane approaching, but didn’t look up until she heard the utility line snap.

She noted that witnessing the attack “totally changed my perspective on everything . . . I am not scared at all . . . It took me until about 7 o’clock that night to realize – holy cow – I was going in there to meet with somebody – what happened to them? . . . [I feel] more caring for people, more of an outreach, more of a sense of community and I’ve really noticed it in my neighborhood with the American flags flying. You don’t really notice until something like this happens how many people are involved with the government.”

Ms. Plyler, who was seven months pregnant at the time, informed her doctor of what she witnessed on 11 September and how she did not recall the stop to buy groceries. Her doctor told her it was “probably a psychological block” to help her cope and get home safely.

Lessons Learned:

In response to a question, Ms. Plyler said that the smart card could be a valuable tool for accounting for people, i.e., knowing where everyone is at a given time. “We need to communicate this technology a lot quicker to a bigger audience and get more buy-in.” As an example, she cited a “Man Overboard” drill whereby all hands could swipe their card and thus gauge the full ship’s accountability. In addition, in the wake of 11 September, she has written press releases and related materials about the Smart Card

Abstract by:

CAPT Steve Horowitz

12 NOV 01

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Subject Terms/Key Words: Eyewitness; Pentagon; Terrorist Attack; 11 September 2001; Smart Card

Transcript of Interview:

Interviewee Information:

Kim Plyler is a contractor with the Navy's Chief of Information (CHINFO) involved in the P.R. aspects of the Common Access Card ("Smart Card"). She is a former Navy journalist who was stationed on a sub tender for four of her five years service. As a civilian, she worked in a number of P.R. jobs before coming to CHINFO. She comes from a military family: Her husband is in the Navy, stationed at NAS Patuxent River, MD. Her father was in the Navy during World War II and one of her brothers, a Marine, was killed in Vietnam.

Topics Discussed:

TAPE ONE-Side One

Q. Tell us from a historical perspective when people listen to this years from now, what are some of the issues you've been working with on the Smart Card?

A. The security issues, definitely. Being able to have personal accountability. Being able to have a commanding officer go onto a ship and push up a database and have full ship's crew visibility just because everybody's swiping their new common access card and the Smart Card technology.

Also, the business process reengineering, reducing paperwork, infrastructure in the military. I helped get it on one ship down out of Norfolk and we've watched it grow so much on that ship. I don't know if you're familiar--have you guys have been on ships?

Q. Yes.

A. Okay. I figured you would be, but just thought I'd double-check. When you are on duty, like you're the CDO and you have to go around and you have a key for every lock on every door and everything, they don't use that on this ship anymore because everybody's permissions are on the card and you can swipe your card on any lock. It's just reduced so much time and effort for people, it's really a great project. They have that it on the quarterdeck. You just go on the quarterdeck and swipe your card and it logs you on and your picture pops up so they know it's you. It's amazing. I wish we had had this technology in the Pentagon because then on the day that this happen they could have just pushed a data base number back at the headquarters and pulled up, and they'd know who was in which room at what time and where. And they'd be able to have a good accountability of who was there in a quicker time.

Q. I'm going to want you to expand on that a little bit while we build that post-incident. Tell us about the 11th of September. Tell us about your day. Just kind of walk us through that.

A. Okay. My first meeting was scheduled at about 8:30 down at the contracting office that I contract through and that was down in Springfield with UII.

Q. What is UII?

A. That is Unified Industries, Inc. in Springfield. I was down there chatting with our contracting officer and we were sitting there and he had his screen up on his computer and he had CNN running on his screen and they started showing the Twin Towers and the planes' hitting the towers up in New York. I immediately panicked because I have an uncle that works in the towers. He is a maritime lawyer up there. So I stopped our meeting and I said, "Look, I'm going to leave so I can call my aunt and see what happened to my uncle and see what's going on," and so I left the meeting and I had another meeting scheduled at the Pentagon for 10:00 o'clock, so I left about, I would say maybe 9:05 from Springfield and was driving up towards the Pentagon listening to the radio and trying to get through to the people up in New York which was impossible because all the lines were down and it was busy and my aunt wouldn't answer the phone at home because she was probably going crazy too. So, this is the ironic part that really gets me every time I think about it. I pulled into the parking lot--well, just before I got to the parking lot at the Pentagon, my phone rang and I answered it and it was a woman canceling my 10:00 o'clock appointment because I was supposed to meet with the Army Corp of Engineers about some kind of mapping and photography that they needed graphic support with. And, so that meeting got cancelled about quarter after nine, twenty after nine that day. So then instead of just leaving, I said, "Oh, well this gives me time to make another appointment!." So I called the CHINFO people, the Navy Chief PAO people and said, "Look, I'm in the area, you know, stop by for a bagel or something and we'll chat," and they said, "Great. We'll go down and get you a bagel." I said, "All right." So then I pulled in the south parking. I always get confused in my directions. I believe it was south parking and I wasn't supposed to be there because you have to have verification and certified stickers and stuff like that and I took the wrong car that morning and I didn't have the stickers on my car. So I was having kind of an argument with the gate

guard who proceeded to let me in after I showed him military dependent ID card and all that stuff. I still stayed in the car making some more phone calls to try and find out about my uncle. And I got out of the car and was standing alongside of the car because I knew I had to walk further than what I was supposed to, double-checked with the CHINFO people, called them and said, "I'm in the parking lot," and they said, "Well, we're going to go down and get you a bagel." I said, "Okay, great." So they left their office to go down and get these bagels and stuff. And I'm standing there and the security guard, not the same one I had an argument with, but another one who came to double-check my car, was standing there and I heard this noise and the only thing I can compare it to is when you are on a ship and they play those video, those protection safety videos on a Navy ship about the snapback when the line pulls too tight and it goes, "toeing!" and snaps. That noise. I heard that and I looked up and there was the American Airlines plane just right over—I felt like you could reach up and touch it, that's how close it was, and you could like, smell this exhaust. I don't know, it was just a weird smell and a weird sound and I looked up and I grabbed the security guard's arm and started screaming, "Look! Oh my God! That one's flying really low," and by the time I got that out of my mouth it hit the Pentagon. But the bizarre thing about it is there were people in the back of the plane. You could see silhouettes. You couldn't make out their faces or anything, but you could tell they were human beings sitting back there and I froze. I just stood there and I started--goose bumps. I didn't know what to do. The only thing I could think of was I was seven months pregnant. My first instinct was to run and help everybody, but then I thought for a second, I can't even lift five pounds right now. How am I going to help lift stuff up? And then I looked towards the other side of the Pentagon because it's almost like the plane--it didn't go directly into--like, it didn't hit like a missile would hit a target. It kind of belly-flopped in, you know, like, swooped in—

Q. Hit the ground first?

A. Yeah, and it was really bizarre because you kind of expected to see it leap-frog and come out the other end or something, you know, logically, but it didn't. And then the next thing, everything was smoke everywhere and I just ran to my car and drove back out the wrong way and got out of there and I don't even know how I got home. The weird thing that happened is the whole way home I felt so guilty because I didn't stay and help anybody out, and like, go back in there and, I don't know why I was feeling that way. By the time I got home, my phones weren't working. My cell phone wasn't working; I couldn't call anybody. I jumped on America Online to send--because everybody knew I had meetings in the Pentagon, and I was sending messages, "I'm okay. I'm okay. I got out. I'm okay. Don't worry." Something made me think, "Oh, I forgot my purse in the car." So I went back to my car and the backseat of my car was loaded with groceries. And I looked and I grabbed the receipt and I'm like, "what?" Evidently on my way home from the Pentagon I had stopped at the grocery store and bought toilet paper, water, you know, survival supplies and didn't even realize I did it and left them in the car until like, two hours later and then I came back to reality and brought them in. But it was kind of a bizarre day.

Q. And you were standing in the south parking lot?

A. Towards the end, right almost where the—

Q. So the Pentagon was on your right?

A. Correct. My sense of direction is off.

Q. But as you were looking towards where the plane was, the Pentagon, it was coming in this way?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay. Well, you're the first person we've talked to that actually has seen the plane.

A. Oh, really.

Q. Yeah. We've got a couple others we're going to talk to.

A. I saw it perfectly. You could see the belly of it underneath and I didn't see the tip of it too well because by the time I had looked up, then I realized what that noise was, that they had snapped the line or a wire somewhere, like a telephone pole—

Q. Telephone poles, or lights, light poles?

A. Yeah. And then that made me look up. I mean, you could hear it coming and I didn't look up because it's, I thought, "Okay. It's a plane landing at National." I didn't even think--it didn't register until I heard that snapback line noise and that's what made me look up.

Q. Then it kind of bounced and then it penetrated the building?

A. Yeah. It wasn't a direct hit like a missile. It was a belly flop kind of thing. That's what it looked like from my vantage point.

Q. Did it appear to go into the building or did it just kind of crunch as it went in?

A. To me, I thought it was going to go in and come out the other side for some reason, I don't know. But it must have gone in and crunched because it didn't.

Q. Had you seen the news reports of the World Trade Center before that happened?

A. Yes.

Q. Because that's what it looked like happened at the World Trade Center.

A. Yeah. There's a similarity.

Q. Maybe that was where that idea was coming from in your head.

A. Yeah, I heard the news reports and I then I saw on the computer screen the first plane hit when I was down in Springfield in the contracting office. So it was so bizarre, because the whole way driving to the Pentagon I kept saying, well, how could they get American planes? Why would an American pilot hit one of--I didn't even--the terrorist thought didn't even register. And it still didn't even register when I was standing in the Pentagon and saw another American Airlines plane hit the Pentagon. I just thought, "Oops, he was flying too low. He missed National." That was my first instinct.

Q. At what point after you left do you ever remember putting it all together and thinking, these are somehow connected? Do you have any memory from driving from the Pentagon to the point where you got those groceries out of the back of your car?

A. Honestly, no. I went back to the grocery store and tried to ask people at the checkout, "Did I come through here?" And there was a lady at the meat--because I got lunchmeat--it really sounds

crazy, but I walked over to her and I said, “I was in here and I bought lunchmeat,” and she said-- she broke into tears and she said, “Are you okay now?” And I said, “You remember me?” And she said, “Yeah, I remember you.” She goes, “We were so worried that you were going to like, deliver your baby here. You were so frantic and frazzled and scared.” And I said, “I don’t even remember being here.” When I got back home and I was e-mailing people on AOL, and like, the information was popping up on AOL and I was watching my TV, I made the connection then at that point because Peter Jennings was talking about it. Then I was like--then it didn’t even seem real. It seemed like it was a TV movie show and I’m like, “I was just standing there. Now Peter Jennings is talking about it.” You know, really bizarre. So I think I made the connection when I got home and saw it on the news.

Q. What has it been like since for you?

A. Very interesting. Totally changed my perspective on everything. I can’t even begin to-- everybody asks me, “Were you scared? Do you wake up in the middle of the night scared?” I am not scared at all and it’s the strangest thing because standing there seeing that--the sympathy, the thing that went through my head and my heart the first was, those poor people on the plane. I mean, the thing that got me next was, it took me until about 7:00 o’clock that night to realize, “Holy cow, I was going in there to meet with somebody. What happened to them?” You know? And so I called around trying to find the Lieutenant Commander that I was going in to meet. Finally, at 9:00 o’clock at night she called me back and she was in tears. She said—

Q. Was that DONNA MURPHY by chance?

A. No, it's BARBARA BURFINE. She said to me, she goes, "We had gone downstairs to get your bagel and we got you orange juice and we weren't in the office." She goes--even though her office wasn't totally demolished, they would have still had to walk through smoke and you know, wheedled their way out. This way they were down in the snack bar area, whatever, and they just went right out the subway exit or something, I don't know. But, she said, "Thank God for your little baby." And then at that point, that was like a whole other perspective, you know. And people keep asking me, "Are you afraid? You should move out of DC." And I'm thinking, no, this is probably the safest place to be at this point. You know, I'd much rather be surrounded by Marines and stuff than living somewhere where there's no help. I think my perspective has changed in there's more caring for people. There's more of an outreach and more of a sense of community. I've really noticed it in my neighborhood with the American flags flying. You don't realize how many people are involved with the government until something like this happens, and my next door neighbor works for either the FBI or the Secret Service or something and I never knew it. So, that came out. It's changed in the sense that it's brought me closer to the community and has made me care more about people--not that I didn't care about people before, but it's just a different.

Q. More of an awareness.

A. Yeah. And things that I used to think were really important aren't really important anymore. So it changed my core values, I guess you would think.

Q. Do you relive that scene that you saw?

A. I didn't until I went back to the Pentagon to update my badge, because my badge expired at the end of October and I had to get a new one. That first day back there, I did, and I kind of like, shook. I didn't think it affected me that much. I thought, "Okay, you know, I'm over this. I'll write about it. I'll tell friends. I'll help other people and all this stuff and it will be okay." And when I went back to the Pentagon that day, I had to stop. A Marine came up and asked if I was okay, and I'm like, yeah. It was just—

Q. As a civilian contractor for the Navy, have you ever heard of the SPRINT team?

A. No.

Q. Did you tell your doctor about what you experienced with the blackout?

A. I sure did and he said it was probably a psychological block to help me cope and get me home safe and get to a safe place, because my first instinct was survival and protect the baby.

Q. Tell us about something you were talking about earlier, about the kind of Smart Card, the electronic mustering capabilities. What are some lessons learned from what you know the capabilities are in the area that you work?

A. One of the big lessons learned is we needed to communicate this technology a lot quicker and out to a bigger audience and get more buy-in from the military as well as the government and Department of Defense to get this implemented. I think since this incident happened, it's starting to come to the forefront, like the Department of Defense had press conferences and they talked about it on CNN. Now the card is coming out as a tool that can be utilized to help account people a lot more quicker than we've been doing in the past.

Q. To know where everybody was at a given time?

A. Yes. Because the way the technology works is, for instance, if you're on a ship and they call a man overboard drill, all you have to do is go up and swipe your card and they know you're down in the engine room or up in the boiler rooms, or wherever, and then they get a full ship's accountability which they could do anywhere. You can implement that technology in an office building. Do it in the Twin Towers. You could do it anywhere. So, my lessons learned would be get it out in the public more and get more attention drawn to it. But then again, you're dealing with a security issue. Most people don't have security on the forefront of their head until an incident happens, which is kind of sad.

Q. Have you seen that change in your capacity in the last two months?

A. Yes, absolutely. I have written press releases. I've written story background feeder information. I've talked with CNN about the technology. So it's coming out, and it's because people are more aware now because of this incident.

Q. (105) Well that would be great if you could get us some copies of some of the things you've written. We'll just put them into your package, into your file just because I think it would be interesting for someone who might hear this years from now and look back and see some of the-- obviously it's a very pivotal time, particularly in the area of your groundbreaking work of the kind of stuff you guys are involved with. It's kind of a new ground.

A. It sure is. And it's a great technology. I keep looking at the card, but it does a lot more than just personnel visibility.

Q. Can you give us kind of an idea of some of where it's going?

A. Right now it's going out to the entire Department of Defense. Every military member, Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, will have this card by the end of 2002, if things keep going the way they are going without any interruptions. Then it's also being implemented at the Department of Interior. They signed an MOA with the Navy about three years ago and they took the technology and have just blown it out in their area, too. So, it's going across the whole government, because it's really well known in Europe and overseas and stuff and Smart Card technology has been around for quite some time. It just hasn't really been accepted, readily accepted in the United States and I think now it's starting to. And it's coming through the Department of Defense, which the Navy is the lead force for the Department of Defense for the technology.

Q. It will have security information, medical information?

A. It acts basically as a token, a token that would tie into a computer base, which would unlock your medical record, for instance. Say you're sitting at home and you want to fill out a leave chit and it's 2:00 o'clock in the morning. You can sit down at your computer and they'll start to come with Smart Card readers in them, and you insert your card and you have some XYZ permissions on here so you can access your page two or your page thirteen or whatever, or access a leave chit and send it in electronically and it'll hit all your chain of command's mailboxes at the same time and then they just digitally signature with the Smart Card and say, "Okay" then you can have your leave approved in an hour, instead of walking it through three or four days to get everybody to sign it.

Q. And everyone is supposed to have the card by the end of 2002? And when you mention that there's a ship that's already implementing some of these things on their ship, is there a timeframe to have the various commands implement the technology?

A. Implement the technology along with the card? Yeah, that should be happening as the card is being issued. There's some people trying to stop it in certain areas. So there's, you know, road-blocks. Every time you try to implement something new, somebody's got to stand up and try and stop you. So, right now, the *USS GEORGE WASHINGTON* Battle Group, the *USS KITTY HAWK* Battle Group, and all the ships and any U's (units) that are affiliated with it, submarines and air wings and all that stuff, they all have the card. Only four or five of the ships can actually use it for something other than mustering on the ship. They have a food service application where you can log in, like if you're at Kaneohe Bay out in Hawaii, Air Force, Army, Navy, Marine Corps, everybody has their Smart Card and they go in and instead of filling out, like, everything putting your rations in kind and your paperwork and your social security number and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah so you can go eat, you swipe your Smart Card and you walk in, and it's DOD -wide. And that saves on the back and paperwork for the guy who is in accounting back in food service trying to figure out how many people ate dinner. So that's another application that's out there. It also stores money which up in Great Lakes, Illinois, they have the Recruit Training Command; when the kids go in and they get their first haircut and they purchase all their stuff, they have a certain amount of money that's put on their card and they just slip the card in at the checkout as you would a credit card, and it deducts it off their little chip.

Q. Yeah, my son's using that in college right now. They have that.

A. I think it's so great. The university is another place where the technology is booming. It makes a lot of sense. Now they are getting equipped with--you put money on it and you can stick it in the back of a cell phone and use it as a debit card for your cell phone so you don't have to pay your bill every month, it just comes right off your card.

Q. Wow. How about your uncle?

A. He's fine. Thank God. He was actually in the second tower when the plane hit the first tower and he was down getting coffee and bagels and he heard all the commotion so he just walked out of the second tower and left, so. But we didn't find out about him until, like 10:00 o'clock—

Q. What floor was he on normally?

A. It would have been on--it was something like 54 or something.

Q. So bagels were an important food for us that day.

A. Yeah, isn't that amazing? Bagels...everybody seemed to be either eating breakfast food or something, I don't know.

Q. Anything else you want to add for the historical record?

A. Not that I can think of, just that it was quite an experience and I still feel sorry for those people on the plane. The hardest thing was seeing--I actually saw bodies in the back windows and it didn't hit until after the plane crunched and I was—

Q. They were sitting?

A. I assumed they were sitting, I couldn't tell. You could see from here up to their heads, so they had to be sitting and one was blond and one was dark-haired, that's all I could tell. I'll bet the blond was a female, I'm pretty sure, because it was longer blond hair. It was so weird when it happened, it was almost like it was in slow motion, like we were watching a TV movie or something and somebody slowed the speed down, and uh, the fact that I just looked up and saw them in the back window and then seconds later, but seemed like hours later, the--you know--they weren't there. That's about it.

Q. Well, thanks for taking the time to share this with us, it's a really unique aspect.

A. Oh, no problem. If you need anything else, give me a call or whatever.

Q. I would like to get those articles anything that you have in the package.

A. Okay, sure.

Q. You can tell [REDACTED]...now tell it for the tape, you're getting ready to have a baby, tell us about it.

A. Oh yeah, little [REDACTED].

Q. How far away are you from delivering your first son?

A. About three weeks, three, three and a half, I don't know. After yesterday's doctor visit they said, well, you know you might not make it the next three weeks. Don't go anywhere after Thanksgiving. I said, okay.

Q. Well, some years later when [REDACTED] looks in his mom's part of the Naval Archives, anything you want to say to him before he enters this world?

A. Oh, just that he's very special because his little spirit helped save--the reason they went down, the people that were in the office went down to get me bagels is because the previous time I'd been there, my feet swelled up after walking through the whole Pentagon, so they felt sorry for me that I was pregnant, so they went down to get me a bagel and orange juice to help take care of me. So, to me, it was his little spirit that motivated them to go do something nice. So, his spirit is special. So if he ever hears this, he's special and he's not even here yet.

Q. Well, thanks for taking the time.

A. Thank you.

Transcribed by:
Carol Barfield for Tim Ayoub
4 March 2002