

**Naval Historical Center  
Oral Interview Summary Form**

**Interviewers:**

CAPT Gary Hall, USNR  
CAPT (S) Mike McDaniel, UNSR  
Dr. Robert Schneller

**Interviewer's Organization:**

Navy Combat Documentation Det 206  
Navy Combat Documentation Det 206  
Navy Historical Center

**Interviewee:**

CDR Thomas Sawyer, USN

**Current Address:**

Navy Annex

**Date of Interview:**

09 Oct 01

**Place of Interview:**

Navy Annex

**Number of Cassettes:**

1

**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. Joined Navy as HM 1975. 9 years active and reserve; left Navy to get degree in health care administration; came back into medical service corps. Current job as community manager for the Medical Service Corps and Dental Corps.
2. Heard planes had hit the WTC on the radio while sitting at his desk in the Navy Annex, 6<sup>th</sup> wing. Did not get to a TV. Heard a low flying jet noise and then a sort of sonic boom. First thought it was a flyover from Arlington cemetery, but when building shook knew it was not. Saw black smoke coming from Pentagon; evacuated from Annex. Went to VDOT across the street to call family to say he was okay. Heard an announcement for all military to go to South Parking at the Pentagon to render aid. He went to the triage area (located up on the grassy area south from Columbia Pike) to stand

by to render first aid. Recalling in his mind first aid, CPR procedures. Grabbed a litter and went to building to evacuate wounded.

3. Guided to within 100 feet of the building next to what would become the gaping hole; received instructions on how to evacuate wounded; had to leave area due to rumor of another inbound airplane. Went back out toward I-95; noticed when he came back the building had collapsed. Litter teams moved towards bldg and were staged along Route 27 next to the Pentagon. Noticed a lot of aircraft debris along the grass surrounding the Pentagon and also a large segment of the silver fuselage with a C and an A on the side, again, American Airlines. The remainder of his day was relocating the litter staging point on one of the road to the other. No casualties were removed from the building during his watch. Firefighters were occasionally brought out who succumbed to smoke.
4. Atmosphere outside the Pentagon was disbelief and awe. Everyone was willing to listen to anyone who seemed to be in charge which changed frequently throughout the day. There were civilian authorities, EMT's , paramedics, and fire and rescue. They were given instruction, given gloves, masks, etc. Rank was not an issue. They were relieved of litter duties by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry of the Old Guard at approximately 1630.
5. The Navy has also preached drills, evacuation safety, etc. Everyone was aware of the sense of urgency. It was a rather smooth and seamless integration of civilian and service members. The civilian resources did an outstanding job. The majority of people he worked with in triage were military. But the civilians were the ones that were in charge.

6. A man came out of the building with a walkie talkie and said another plane was inbound. The litter teams had never gone into the building; the warning of another plane did not interrupt any rescue operations that he knew of. Fire and rescue and the FBI were doing their job in a professional manner. He was not aware of the FBI not allowing anyone to go in the building.
7. Lessons learned – be more aware of building evacuation plans, mass casualties and fire drills. More aware of your surroundings. The USS COLE incident got us up and running for this event because we had already had to set up a crisis action center for CNP.
8. His training in dealing with mass casualties came from dealing with motor vehicle accidents while stationed at Camp Pendleton. They dealt with I-5 accidents. Also in Saudi he set up field hospitals to include operating and treatment rooms. This experience was ten years ago but he remembered it all that day. After the Gulf he served as a training officer of a field medical training school. In that job he used Gulf war experiences to help illustrate training concepts.
9. The SPRINT team was invaluable in helping people to cope with the experience. Commanding officers of the ships of different commands are on board and realize how important they are. Combat psychological help – the farther away a patient gets from the front line the harder it is to get him back to the front line, so they catch them early and quick, help them to understand their feelings. That the best group to be with is the group back at work. This accelerates the healing process and gets us back to business as usual.

10. CNP established a patient contact representative for Navy servicemen who were hospitalized. Six were evacuated to four different hospitals and they were visited twice a day.

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**Transcript of Interview:**

**Interviewee Information:**

Joined the Navy in 1975 as a hospital corpsman. Did a total of nine years both active duty and as a Reserve. Got a degree in health care administration, then came back in to take a commission in the medical service corps. I've been a medical service corps officer since 1984. Right now am working as the Medical Service Corps Community Manager and Dental Corps Community Manager

**Topics Discussed:**

Q: Hall- Where is your office.

A: Sawyer - My office is here in the Navy Annex in the 6<sup>th</sup> wing.

Q: Hall – Tell us a little bit about what you do in your job.

A: Sawyer – What I do is help prepare accession, promotion, and strength plans for the two Corps that I manage, Medical Service Corps and Dental Corps. Working within the Personnel Plans and Policies Branch here for CNP.

A: Hall- Could you give us a little bit of the Chain of Command

A: Sawyer – Again, my code is for MSC and Dental Corps. I report to the Department Community Manager and she in turn reports to N131, CAPT Malarkey and up to N13 is ADM Henry and then up to ADM Wright and Moore.

Q: Hall – What we want to focus on today is what happened on September 11. Could you start talking to us about that? Tell us how your day started and then your focus of the events of the incident

A: Sawyer – What I would like to do since you were one of several that had at least asked for a statement at least for consistency, if I could just read my statement it pretty much says exactly what happened.

Like everyone else on 11 SEPT working at my desk I had heard that planes had flown into the World Trade Center. I was listening to this on my radio. I was not able to get to a TV because of the work I was doing here at my desk. While working at my desk we heard a low flying jet and then I thought I heard a sonic boom. We often do hear low flying jets as Arlington Cemetery is right next to us and they occasionally do flyovers in respect for the veterans being buried. At first I thought it was a burial ceremony, but when our building shook from the blast we knew something was not right. We glanced out the window and it proved to us we were in trouble. Black smoke was coming from the area of the Pentagon. We evacuated the building and while we were out in the parking lot many people were trying to call on cell phones, but none were working. I was

able to get to an office in a nearby VDOT Virginia Department of Transportation office across from the building to leave a message for the family that I was okay. When I left VDOT an announcement was made in our parking lot for all military to go to the South Parking lot of the Pentagon to render aid and help. I got my second workout of the day running to the South Lot. When I got there, approximately 10:00, a person asked for any medical personnel. So I went to the triage area to standby for first aid. I can't tell you the thoughts racing through my head about my training for CPR and Basic Life Support and all the other stuff I had learned and taught while at field medical service school at Camp Pendleton. An immediate yell was heard that litter bearers were needed to evacuate wounded from the building. I grabbed the nearest litter and ran with others to help. Along the way I was able to pick up 3 more people to help as stretcher bearers and we were guided to, approximately I'd say, within 100 feet of the building, next to the red fire truck that was parked in front of what would become a gaping hole in the side of the building. We received instructions on when we would be directed to enter to evacuate casualties. Suddenly we received word that another plane was inbound about 20 miles out and we were ordered to get away from the building. We sprinted back to the South Parking Lot and I kept scanning the horizon to see if I could see the aircraft and its approach. We continued as far as I-95 highway. Many people were taking shelter under the highway overpass. Personally, I stayed away from that, as I didn't want to be wearing any asphalt if that other plane was coming in. This, I believe, was the plane that ended up crashing just outside of Pittsburgh. We worked our way around the highway and back to the triage areas and I noticed that the building had collapsed. When we were close to the building earlier the main wall was still intact, burning but intact.

Q: Hall – What time was that? How much time had elapsed?

A: Sawyer – Very hard to say. I would say probably 15 minutes, 20 minutes maybe.

Worked out way back around the highway where we had seen the building had collapsed and at that point I just couldn't believe what I was looking at. It was just incredible to me that what had often been a very brief topic of conversation with all terrorist activity that had been happening the past 5 or 6 years that this could have happened and was happening before my eyes. The litter teams moved towards the building and were staged along Route 27 next to the Pentagon. These were all the litter teams that had been initially formed up and were still forming after that second announcement of the plane coming in. As we were staging ourselves I noticed a great deal of aircraft debris along the grass surrounding the Pentagon, and also a large segment of the silver fuselage with a C and an A on the side, again, American Airlines. The remainder of the day consisted of being relocated to the litter staging point on one side of the road to the other. Many people were bringing water and food to those that were volunteering with the firefighting, and the FBI conducting evidence searches of the line from one end of the grass to the other. There were no casualties removed from the building during what I would call my watch, at least that I was aware of, as the FBI was doing their initial investigation of the area.

There were firefighters occasionally brought out who had suffered from smoke inhalation or were overcome by the situation in the building in some form or another. The only others to exit the building, I guess, were those to get out on their own or were assisted by others who were ambulatory. At least I didn't witness any others coming out. The mood and the atmosphere among those who were standing by were ones of disbelief and awe



while observing the event. Everyone was willing to listen to those who appeared to be in charge, which changed frequently throughout the day. Rank was not an issue. There were two star generals assisting sergeants, Navy and Air Force with Army and Coast Guard were working side by side too. Americans just trying to make the best of a terrible situation. Then, myself as a volunteer, we stood by there litter in hand until relieved by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry of the Old Guard. And this happened at approximately 1630. I made my way back to the office and checked for the Command Crisis Center watch bill. And that would conclude the events of the day for me. Unless there are any specific questions?

Q: Hall – Where was the triage area located that you first reported to after receiving word on the loud speaker to get down there.

A: Sawyer - The triage area is as you were to travel down Columbia Pike, the road, to go underneath the bridge of 27, the triage area was immediately to the left up on the grass area. Up on the grass area.

Q: Hall – How did you know to go there? Were you receiving word?

A: Sawyer – There were other people standing along the way that said medical is over there. And being that I have the Medical Service Corps in my left collar they just helped to direct.

Q: Hall – Who was kind of in charge at first, you described a shifting pattern of

A: Sawyer – Well, initially again, there were the civilian authorities, the EMTs, the paramedics, and the fire and rescue. That was, those people were in charge until we doubled back from I-95 and came back down with litters and it shifted from an Air Force Master Sergeant to an Army Colonel to an Army LTC, but still everybody that was there with litters did not question. I guess my point is they were not questioning who are you,

are you in charge, what's going on. They were standing by ready to help listen to anybody how might give them direction.

Q: Hall - Was it your opinion that somebody had just stepped up to do that.

A: Sawyer – No. No, these people were coming from the area where the civilian authorities were at, coming from some other triage areas that they had set up. Their emergent areas, I think they had color-coded them green, yellow, and red to help organize the litter bearer teams, and again they were giving directions. Also telling us where these other triage areas had been set up what would be expected of us, passing out gloves, passing out masks, those types of things.

Q: Hall – Was this organization, do you think, the result of some sort of military plan for a disaster or do you think it's just the way emergency medical people are trained to respond in an event like this.

A: Sawyer – I think the Navy has always preached drills, always preached EVAC safety, man overboard whether it's CONFLAG drills, whatever it might be, aboard ship. Even in the hospitals we've done our patient evacuation drills or play our casualty drills and little bits and pieces from all these drills were coming together. I think everybody was aware of the sense of urgency we had here, where they probably felt their place would be in this situation and just wanting to standby for help.

Q: Hall – It was a rather seamless or smooth integration of civilian and different services people

A: Sawyer – My observation and my perceptions was yes. It appeared to be working very well. I would have to say that the civilian resources that were down there did an outstanding job. They came in, they took control, and they were very willing to, I think

with the type of volunteer group that they had, knowing that they were military, knowing that many of them probably were medical, from that building that had been attacked, that were going to utilize those resources as best as they could.

Q: Hall – I was going to ask what was the approximate percentage mix of civilian – military. You said that on your way down that they were sending the military down to help, right, and was it predominately military helpers under civilian supervision?

A: Sawyer – That came down from the Navy Annex.

Q: Hall – Or just the triage areas in which you worked?

A: Sawyer – The majority of the people that I, I'll say was working with, were military. Again, those that were civilian were the ones that were definitely in charge. I did not go over to the triage area that was primarily set up by the fire and rescue and the paramedics, the civilians; the group of volunteers that I was with was primarily military.

Q: Hall - How was word of the approach of the second aircraft disseminated, was it a shout that rang out.

A: Sawyer – A man came out. He was holding a walkie talkie. He was running towards us waving get away from the building, get away from the building, a second plane is inbound, approximately 20 miles out. And, pardon my French, as I'm hauling towards the South Parking Lot to get away from the building and trying to quickly do the math in my head of 500 mph 20 miles out. So I was trying to move as quickly as I could.

Q: Hall – Did that call prevent litter teams from going in and taking people out that otherwise might have been

A: Sawyer – Well, when we went up to the building the initial time, none had gone in. No litter teams had gone in. We were just standing by there and that's when the call

came out and we dispersed. So as far as it prevented anybody from going in, we weren't going in when we first got that announcement, and definitely weren't afterwards. It was primarily just get away from the building.

Q: Hall – So, you spent most of the day waiting. Was that frustrating, not being called on to go get somebody?

A: Sawyer – Well, I guess initially, yes, just from my background. But, it wasn't a frustrating issue in looking at all that was being done that day, in knowing that the FBI was out there. That fire and rescue were out there. That I guess it wasn't frustrating because I knew that there were other more qualified, more professional rescue personnel out there doing the job in an outstanding manner. So it wasn't a personal concern that I couldn't get out there to help evacuate.

Q: Hall – What was your take on the FBI investigation that maybe interfered with rescue effort or were they doing their work when it was clear that nothing more could be done rescue wise?

A: Sawyer – The tasks at hand for fire and rescue and for FBI seemed to work very, very well. I didn't see any dialogue or discussion about having to wait or having to let somebody else say look at debris on the ground in a cordoned off area when there might have been people in there. Everybody was working very well together from what I could see.

Q: Hall – So, it was very orderly?

A: Sawyer – It appeared that way to me.

Q: Hall - Were you aware of any plan that was being followed or was it your sense that leaders were leading or the right people were just standing up and taking charge to execute.

A: Sawyer – The right people were standing up and taking charge. Again, many different types of professionals out there. And my perception and I felt that they knew where they had to be, especially those that came out from the Pentagon. I had an idea of what other resources were out there, you know, to help take care of the situation. So they were able to identify those resources, use them right, be able to come up and say, you know, identify themselves and this is what I'm trained to do. That kind of information was being passed quickly and people were being put to work. The right people were being put to work.

Q: Hall – What would you say if any lessons were to be learned from this, what would you say those were? .

A: Sawyer – Without being too philosophical, I think probably the lesson learned that everybody will be a little more aware of our building evacuation plan, mass casualties, fire drills. Probably a lessons learned will be just being more aware of your surroundings. We had with the Cole incident I think at least in this building here, we had gone through previously standing up our own crisis center and setting up a watch bill and going through the CNP duties and responsibilities for such as incident. So that was a little bit of the event that got us up to speed a lot quicker, because we were trained from that event.

Q: Hall – As a result of what happened with the Cole or just what happened with the Cole and your involvement with it?

A: Sawyer – Probably both, but at least the people who stood up the crisis center for this Pentagon incident were experienced from the Cole incident so things moved much quicker and much more smoothly. I really couldn't speak on the officers and service members who worked at the Pentagon what kind of lessons learned from them, but I think just here from this side.

Q: Hall – In your experience, and from your whole background, have you ever experienced anything with mass casualties?

A: Sawyer – Yes. Actuals might be multiple motor vehicle accidents and casualties coming into the ER. I'm just being at the hospital at Camp Pendleton where I was initially stationed and basically had responsibility for I-5, which was the main highway out in California. So we'd get many motor vehicle accidents back there at the hospital. My experience out in Saudi with setting up our field hospitals and being able to use the personnel assets that we've got and setting up OR's and treatment rooms. That experience also. None within the last 10 years, other than casualty drills.

Q: Hall – It happened 10 years ago, does it come back fresh?

A: Sawyer – Yes

Q: Hall – Had you thought about that? Why or how?

A: Sawyer – Like I said, well, not so much being in the Gulf, but after the Gulf my next assignment was as a training officer of a field medical training school. So, that training there did come back.

Q: Hall – I was just going to follow up on that – what is the importance of training? Maybe we kind of talked a little bit about that. It should look to a lessons learned?

What's the right tie-in? Have you thought about - Can you train too much? What is the proper level of training, as opposed to overreact?

A: Sawyer - If I can answer that question in this way. For any training, and that was part of the challenge as training officer was to be able to set the tone for the training so that it would have an impact. And again the Service Medical Training Course, we are getting very young service members coming through our halls for a seven week course, so to set the tone for them, other than being okay I've only got to do 7 weeks here and Navy training and that type of thing. To give them examples, and it helped giving examples from the Gulf, but that tended to wain after 2 or 3 years, when everybody had heard all the stories. So setting the tone could be a lessons learned for training.

Q: Hall – Let me take a little different tack here because of your background and experience. What are some of the long-range ramifications of what people have experienced in something like this. They may have never trained for it, never experienced it. Obviously, experienced something that is life changing, as far as trauma, and things exposed to. You are trained for it. What are some of longer range, what is the long-range impact of some of that on the rescue workers, people who were involved in the offices there, experienced it? Looking at it from a lessons learned?

A: Sawyer – That one would be difficult for me to answer. What kind of impact or what kind of effect it had on other people. Since your being here you may have seen that there are fliers out for crisis center and for being able to come in and talk to some of the physicians. That can help other people understand and describe to them their feelings and maybe deal with their feelings about it. That's going to be important. Very obviously, that need for the psychological help and emotional help of everybody to deal

with this event. The team that went down to interview the Cole 5 minutes after the incident, and we heard a lot about the SPRINT Team and how important the SPRINT Team was on scene there and how the impact that was having months later and, obviously, you've got a situation here that impacted a lot of people in the area, New York City as well, and there will be other incidents. I guess it's like what you've had to deal with in your lifetime. You know, what might we be able to do to help prepare others, or are there safety nets there to capture some of those who are experiencing things. The SPRINT teams I think are invaluable, at least from my experience have grown I think in the past 3 to 5 years not only in how many we have but in their role and I think one of the things that is a very positive factor for them is that the Commanding Officers of the ships of the different commands are on board with them and realize how very, very important they are. And they can be important on a routine basis before hand, you can bring them in, you know on CONFLAG drills on a ship, okay, to let their crew know that this asset this resource is available. And sometimes that can be just a calming and a reassuring effect on the crew of on the staff of any command, knowing that that help is there. It might be something that they can deal within a situation then and there knowing that that's a resource.

Q: Hall – Do you have any thoughts on how that concept plays into getting back to business as usual in a military setting?

A: Sawyer – It's just like. It's not just like. I'll use the example of the improvements we've made in combat psychological help. The further away that patient gets away from the front line the harder it is to him back, you know, with a rifle and to the front line. So we catch them early and we catch them quick, we help them deal with the situation, help



them understand their feelings. That it's okay, that it's normal, and that they're not alone, they're not the only person feeling that and the best group to be with is the group back at work, back at the front dealing with it. And I think it accelerates the healing process and gets us back to business as usual. There probably is a better sense of urgency and sense of purpose.

Q: Hall – Do you think that concept is well understood in the Navy?

A: Sawyer – It's becoming more understood, as I said, the COs and our leadership are more on line with that I think than ever before, and that's a big plus.

Q: Hall – Back to business. You were relieved by the Old Guard on the 11th at 1630 and came back up here. The question is, how late did you stay and how has your job been impacted between then and now by these events? Has your job changed, driven according to these things?

A: Sawyer – At the site the Old Guard showed up at approximately 1630 and by the time we had gotten the word, "Thank you very much and please stand down." and were walking back up here to the building I was back up here about 1700, 1715 and probably did not leave until about 1800 or 1815. That was primarily just talking about things that had happened down there with co-workers up here, which in itself was helpful to decompress. I was tired. My head and my face were sunburned. And the next thing I thought of was the phone call I made to my family saying I was okay and I just wanted to get home and see them and let them see me so that they would be more rest assured. The next day came back to work early and continued to listen on the radio. It took about an hour for me to get my thoughts together and on my inbox and on my desk and on my computer and on what I had to deal with and started to take care of one piece of paper at

a time and got back into what was on my desk and had to be take care of. The other thing that was very much an example of change were the daily briefings by the Admiral, for us to gather information for the Admiral. One of the collateral duties I had after the 11<sup>th</sup> with our Medical Department Community Managers was there were the three of us, we ended up enlisting another officer who was to act what I would call a Patient Contact Representative for CNP for those Navy service men who had been hospitalized. There were six that had been evacuated to 4 different facilities and we made sure that we were doing twice daily visits to make sure that the service members were taken care of, if they had any questions that we could answer, if there were any issues that were working related or command related that we could help liaison for them. One in particular was a Petty Officer Lewis who was already in the newspaper. His vehicle was parked in the South Parking lot and he was at the hospital and had no way to get it. So, worked with his significant other to get permission to go in the parking lot and retrieve the vehicle for him. He couldn't stop saying thank you and for some reason that was one of the major things on his mind.

Q: Hall – Who were some others that we need to talk to?

A: Sawyer – CDR Kevin Magnusson, LCDR Dave Lemek, CAPT Judy Logeman

Q: Hall – Related to that, did you observe any heroes that you can remember or tell us about??

A: Sawyer – I would have to say no, unfortunately. I know there were many out there. I didn't identify one or was able to say wow, look at that. The fire crews that kept going up the ladder and going into the building were heroes. The paramedics that were dealing

with anybody and everybody that came out were heroes. The real heroes were inside the building, unfortunately.

Q: Hall – Do you have children?

A: Sawyer – Yes.

Again, I'm CDR Thomas Sawyer. Joined the Navy in 1975 as a hospital corpsman. Did a total of nine years both active duty and as a Reserve. Got a degree in health care administration, then came back in to take a commission in the medical service corps. I've been a medical service corps officer since 1984. Right now am working as the Medical Service Corps Community Manager and Dental Corps Community Manager.

Q: Hall – How old are they?

A: Sawyer – They are, depends on what day of the week. They are right now 13, 15 and 17.

Q: Hall – What have you told them? What kind of questions have they ask?

A: Sawyer – Well, they one, why? How come it's taken us so long to kind of get back at them? Is this with Saddam Hussein type of this? There're taking some of their old news headlines and seeing if they link up or or not I guess. I asked my middle son, what do you think of all that's going on? Again, pardon my French, "It sucks and we need to get back at them." They, they are not very expressive of their own personal opinions, but we sit down and watch the news every night and get the latest update. "Dad why are we attacking these guys why don't we just go straight in." Course, it's argue with a 13 year old the political as well as world perspective on exactly where we're going and how we're trying to do.

Q: Hall – Excuse me gentlemen, did you have to be somewhere at 1:00, 1300?

. Other interviewers – 1400.

Hall – Ok, I'm sorry.

A: Sawyer – And not so much trying to teach them, but its teaching me how to deal with my kids too. I feel very fortunate they're at an age where they can see the TV, they can listen to their friends, they can hear the radio, and piece most of the puzzle together with some of those things, those underlying religious aspects or other political points that we are always privy to. Then trying to coin it best, my dad said, "Don't believe anything you hear and only half of what you see." So, in trying to impart that on to them also listen carefully to what you hear and what you see on TV and radio. But don't take this gospel and be running out and telling it to everybody else

Q: Hall – But to read into that as well.

A: Sawyer – That's true.

Q: Hall – Anything else that you want to tell us or have on the tape?

A: Sawyer – No, just retrospectively why I didn't think more conscientiously, more about what was happening at the World Trade Center at the time, cause my right ear was on the radio and my left ear was in the phone talking with Millington and other business as usual issues. But, just seeing the Pentagon I kept thinking to myself the many times that we had thought about a terrorist attack. That the Pentagon was very vulnerable. That our national treasures were very vulnerable here in DC. That maybe what we've enjoyed in the past, glad we've been alive to enjoy that, but the American way of life has definitely changed from that day forward. And just the feeling of having the right leadership in the right places right now. We've learned a great lesson from the Gulf in letting the military leaders do what they get paid for. And I think we've got it. From

what I've heard and read and discussed as far as a plan on how we're going to end terrorism we have a good plan and looking forward to seeing that come to fruition.

Hall – Well we really appreciate you taking your time to talk with us today. And wish you well.

Sawyer – Thank you very much.

Hall – Thanks much.

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