

**Naval Historical Center  
Oral Interview Summary Form**

**Interviewers:**

CAPT Mike McDaniel  
CDR Karen Loftus

**Interviewer's Organization:**

Navy Combat Documentation Det 206  
Navy Combat Documentation Det 206

**Interviewee:**

CDR Joan Zitterkopf

**Current Address:**

██████████  
████████████████████

**Date of Interview:**

27 Nov 2001

**Place of Interview:**

NC2, Crystal City, Arlington VA

**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 ██████████, Iowa. Grew up there her entire life. Wanted to go to college; ended up at the Naval Academy. Second class of women to graduate. Was not prepared for the hostile environment toward women. Senator Grassley gave her the nomination. Very interested in aviation. Decided she wanted to be a pilot; five women were selected for pilot training. She was number six; went to NFO training. Applied for pilot school through a fleet program and she was accepted. Flew the CH-53 and the H-2. Command tour at HC-4 in Sicily. Now on OPNAV staff in Naval Aviation and Manpower, N789. Reported aboard in March and worked in Crystal City. Took over as the B Code (Director of the Training and Manpower branch) and it was moved to the Pentagon, outside N78's office. She works for ADM Richardson directly who works for ADM McCabe. Her employees remained in Crystal City. She works aircrew, pilot and NFO production, aviation simulators, revolutionizing trainers, and do manpower issues for aviation. Key issues on 11 September were the end of PRO3, simulators, T-45 procurement and cockpit 21, the digitized cockpit for the T-45. Also working support for TIMS (Training Information System) for the training command, a computerized training jacket for all of the training command. Getting annual support for that program into the budget. Had a meeting scheduled that morning at about 1100. Office located in the Pentagon at 4C453.
2. Military history in the family. Two of her father's uncles served in WWII. She did not know that until her senior year in the Academy. He served in Pearl Harbor during the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The second uncle's history was not known until a few years ago. Biggest influence in life was her grandmother. Her mantra was to study hard and do whatever you wanted in life. Study hard and opportunities would open up. Many

women in her hometown served in WWII and she did not know that, although they all gave her a lot of support when she made the decision to go to the Academy. Victory in Europe newspaper from her hometown showed everyone who served in WWII. She commented that every man was in the service. Who ran the town? The women. There were also a significant number of women who served.

3. [REDACTED] was her archrival in high school. He told her she wouldn't get into the Academy, so she did. He was her motivation to apply. They are friends to this day.
4. On September 11<sup>th</sup>. She got in early to work on fitreps and to prepare for the T-45 meeting that morning; rode metro to work. Told about the crash into the WTC; got the call from the command center because they were aviation. Could the plane have been a Navy one? Turned TV on. Called down to tell the flag officers there was an aircraft mishap but at this point no indications it was a Navy aircraft. Looked at clear blue sky and commented that it was unusual for a plane to hit under those circumstances. Called the command center to tell them they were watching it on TV. Saw the second plane hit the second building. Knew at that time it was a terrorist attack. Watched in silent horror. Went back to her desk. Over to 5D453 where they had a TV. Someone commented that the roof of the Pentagon was five concentric circles. She commented that if they were painted red they would be a big bulls eye. Joked they were sitting in the middle of a bullseye. Went back to her desk and said they ought to leave – that they should not be in the building. She was called into the front office and whether or not to reschedule the meeting. She recommended canceling; they said to have the meeting. Aircraft hit at that time. She was standing on an expansion joint. Remembers feeling one foot going up and one foot going down. Fell into a pillar. Looked out window and all she saw was an intense, indescribable orange. Several people panicked and screamed. Grabbed her sunglasses (no naval aviator would go anywhere without them). Reminded her of fire drills they would do in school.
5. Came out of the C ring; thought about making a sweep through D ring to make sure everyone was clear. Looked toward D ring – the black smoke was billowing, literally rolling towards them. Saw CAPT Hart and one of his secretaries coming toward them out of the black smoke. Was told everyone back there was out, so she headed out. Never looked again toward the E-ring. Turned left toward escalators. Massive mob of people. Firewall started to come out of the wall. She panicked at that point. Turned to see if there was another way to go out, and only saw the E-ring engulfed in the thick black smoke. Brighter smoke, but thinks no flames. Ran up and tripped the safety on the door and told everyone to get through them. Second door started to close and she ran up and tripped that one. Continued to exit the building. Everyone walking down the escalators. Noted how surprisingly orderly the evacuation was. Went through 2<sup>nd</sup> corridor, main entrance into North Parking. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> corridor at B/C ring when an announcement was made not to exit through the 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> corridor. Again, how orderly the evacuation was going. Where to go? Never talked of an assembly point. Checked in with other so they could keep track of who got out. Concern at that point turned to her people in Crystal City. Finally got through on the cell phone. They did not know anything had happened yet. Had heard about New York. Told them to evacuate; to get a head count and a muster, then get home.

6. Next concern to get her family. Sister in Alaska was called. Told her she was okay. Then called her son's school – Hayfield Elementary. He was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Her knees shook at that point. Uncontrollable shiver throughout her body. Realized what had happened. Had no wallet, no way home. Walked toward bus stop in Crystal City. Ran into a lady who was looking for a hotel. She was from New York City, worked on the 104<sup>th</sup> floor of the WTC. They walked until they got a ride. Took two hours to get to the metro station in Alexandria where her car was located. Took Gail to her house. Several neighbors who were military dropped in.
7. The school handled the situation well. Called the military spouses together and asked what to do. Plan – all PTA volunteers were assembled; one was assigned to each child whose parent was in the military. Made the announcement that there was a dreadful accident at the Pentagon. If you were a military child and your parent worked in the Pentagon, had to see a PTA volunteer prior to boarding the bus. Did not want anyone to go home to an empty house. If one of the parents was not at home, children not allowed to go home alone.
8. Did not sleep that night. Lives near the Coast Guard station near Ft. Belvoir. Lots of helo traffic in and out that night, and also a lot of fighter traffic. She is under the flight path for National airport. Bothered her because she never expected to hear a fighter plane in her hometown. On the 12<sup>th</sup>, not sure what to do. She accounted for her people to CDR Neilson, the assistant EA. Called her three section heads and said let's go to work. Get their spaces and computers set up in Crystal City to help others who were disconnected. Learned of an Admiral's meeting for the B codes. She attended. Worked hard that day to figure out where everyone was; how to telecommute; how to keep functioning knowing that they could operate from home.
9. Life since the attack. Still a gap and disorganization for a period of time. Still have to think through what happened on the programs; trying to piece things back together. Will have to move two more times in the Pentagon. Feels transient; staff duty is not supposed to be that way. Feels cut off from what is going on. Fighting a war; her major source of information is CNN. Thinks she should be there. Personally there is still PTSD effects, where she tries to relax and she still sees the orange, smells the smell of the fire; jet fuel. When she relaxes it comes back. Still bothered by the sound of the fighters. Frustrated to be bogged down by reams of rules when she wants to move things faster to support the people on the front line.
10. Her son was interviewed in the Washington Post in the kid's section. Also interviewed a child whose father was deployed, and a Quaker child. Three different perspectives on the war through the eyes of a child. She was very impressed with the result.
11. She speaks on Women's History. She was the second class at the Academy; some of the animosity came as a shock to her. Being a girl had never been a big deal growing up. She had always believed that if there was something not available to women, you fixed it. Brought up in an even society where your talents counted. Hunkered down and hid. Decided to survive; that was her defense mechanism. Decided not to fight them but to beat them. Thought of the women in her hometown who had served. Reflecting that she had graduated from the Academy and knew nothing of the women who had served in WWII. Started reading women's history in the war. After getting her wings, a group

called the Silver Salts in San Diego asked her to speak about her experience at the Naval Academy. Jill Hawkins, Class of 80, and she were asked to speak. As she spoke to them she realized it was an entire roomful of WWII vets, and a few Korean vets. Told them before her speech that she should be listening to them and not the other way around. One of them patted her on the head and said, "No, but you can thank us. We'd like to hear what a difference we made." They adopted her. None of them had children; they were not allowed to marry so no children. They called her their granddaughter and they invited her to different events. Got to meet some amazing women. Enjoyed their histories. When her mother came out the women hosted a party for their daughter, her mother. Her son is the most spoiled child because he has multiple great grandmothers. She was asked to speak at a Women's History Month event. She realized that everyone has a history to tell, and if you don't record it you will forget it. Talks of her thoughts on history. Talks of capturing September 11<sup>th</sup>, that it is still a wound, and should be recorded properly. She encourages people to tell a child their history, so that it will be remembered. Interested in Women's History, but wishes it were not Women's History Month but just History Month.

Abstract by:

CDR Loftus

28 November 2001

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CDR Zitterkopf was born in ██████████, Iowa. She grew up there her entire life. Wanted to go to college; ended up at the Naval Academy. Second class of women to graduate. Was not prepared for the hostile environment toward women. SENATOR GRASSLEY gave her the nomination. Very interested in aviation. Decided she wanted to be a pilot; five women were selected for pilot training. She was number six; went to NFO training. Applied for pilot school through a fleet program and she was accepted. Flew the CH-53 and the H-2. Command tour at HC-4 in Sicily. Now on OPNAV staff in Naval Aviation and Manpower, N789. Reported aboard in March and worked in Crystal City. Took over as the B Code (Director of the Training and Manpower branch) and it was moved to the Pentagon, outside N78's office. She works for ADM RICHARDSON directly who works for ADM MCCABE. Her employees remained in Crystal City. She works aircrew, pilot and NFO production, aviation simulators, revolutionizing trainers, and manpower issues for aviation. Key issues on 11 September were the end of PRO3, simulators, T-45 procurement and cockpit 21, the digitized cockpit for the T-45. Also working support for TIMS (Training Information System) for the training command, a computerized training jacket for all of the training command. Getting annual support for that program into the budget. Had a meeting scheduled that morning at about 1100. Office located in the Pentagon at 4C453.

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you wanted in life. Study hard and opportunities would open up. Many women in her hometown served in WWII and she did not know that, although they all gave her a lot of support when she made the decision to go to the Academy. Victory in Europe newspaper from her hometown showed everyone who served in WWII. She commented that every man was in the service. Who ran the town? The women. There were also a significant number of women who served.

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### **Topics Discussed:**

#### TAPE ONE—Side One

Q. (16:27.7) Tell us about your day on 11 September. Just kind of walk us through your whole day.

A. Well, obviously, it was relatively uneventful. We had come in very, very early that morning.

Q. (16:41.7) Where do you live?

A. I live out in Alexandria, VA. I ride the metro to work, so I had jumped on a bus like I always do. That morning I had caught the 5:30 a.m. train, so it would have been the 5:10 bus from home; catch the 5:30 train in because we had some work to do on the T-45 issues and we were going to have a big meeting that day. I was sitting at my desk working on that and I was also trying to finish some fitness reports that were supposed to have been signed 10 days prior. I was working hard to try and get some paperwork caught up before all the meetings started that morning. We had our usual 7:30 a.m. meeting and I went back to my desk and was working on the fitness reports. I think my meeting was at 11:00 o'clock that day so I knew I had a little bit of time in the morning to do some admin. I was sitting working on that when the Chief came out of the Admirals outer office and said he'd gotten a phone call that there had been an airplane crash into the World Trade Center. Because we were aviation, we got the phone call from the

Command Center telling us. We had no more information than that. Basically, it was a phone call, "Are you missing an airplane? Could it have been yours?" All the senior officers were down in a meeting in N7 spaces so the Chief came out -- I happened to be, I guess, the most senior one sitting around. He said, "What should we do?" We decided to go ahead and turn the TV on and start watching the news and see if we could get any more info and in the meantime, call down and tell the Flag Officers that there had been an aircraft mishap but that at this point in time we had no indication it was our aircraft. So, we turned on the TV; flipped through the channels several times; didn't find anything yet. Then one of the networks, I believe ABC -- we caught the first pictures of the first Trade Center that had been hit. We stood in there and watched and then several other people started gathering in the office to see what was going on. In typical pilot fashion, we walked back out to where my office was, where you could see out the window. In the outer office and in the Admiral's, there were no windows, so we walked back out. We kind of looked out at the clear blue sky and scratched our heads and commented that "How in the world, on a clear blue day, could somebody get lost enough that they would hit the side of a building?" That was my mindset at that point in time that somebody had made an absolutely dreadful approach into the airport and had plowed into the side a building. We went back in to watch and to call down and tell them that we had it on TV and that if they wanted to they should flip on this channel to see it. There were probably eight of us or so standing in there watching when the second one came around the corner. We stood and watched as it plowed into the second building.

Q. (20:14.6) You saw it live?

A. I saw it live! There was just kind of a gasp in the room because, obviously, we knew at that point in time, it wasn't what we thought it had been, that somebody had gotten lost, but, indeed, it was a terrorist attack. We were relatively dumbfounded, watched in almost a silent horror for a few minutes. Then we decided we needed to get back to our job. So I went back to my desk, realized that I wasn't going to do the fitness reports at that point in time. My mind was not focused on that, so I was going to get ready for my meeting later on that morning. I went over into 5D453, where they had a television. In every office space you had to have at least one. We all were gathered around the TV watching. There were a lot of people, a lot of talking. I remember, distinctly, at one point in time, someone commenting that the roof of the Pentagon was five concentric circles. I joked and said, "Yeah, if we painted them red, we'd just be a big bull's eye!" We joked about we probably were "sitting in the middle of a bulls eye." Joking is not the right term but ribbing, I guess, about it and went on back to what we were doing. I went back over to my desk and said, "You know I think we really ought to be getting out of here. I just don't think we ought to be in this building!"

Q. (22:06.9) Who did you say that to?

A. The three people in my office. Then they called me in the front office again to talk about the meeting and whether we should reschedule it. They had the Admirals on the phone downstairs in the N7 office. They were trying to decide whether we were going to continue with our meeting or whether we were going to do something different or what really we should be doing at this point in time. I said, I thought we should cancel the meeting until things calm down. They said, "No, we're going to go ahead and have the meeting. Call down to the people that are coming and tell them we're going to go ahead with the meeting." So I walked back out of the office towards



my desk when the aircraft impacted the Pentagon. I was standing -- right through the middle of my desk was the expansion joint of the Pentagon. As best I can recall, I must have been standing right on the expansion joint. I distinctly remember one foot going up and it felt like one foot going down. So I don't know which one gave, but it felt to me like both moved. I tipped and fell into the pillar and hit my elbow on the pillar. In my usual delicate style, said, "Fuck, we've been hit!" Something fell and hit me and it turned out to be the rubber expansion joint in the ceiling hit me on the arm. I didn't know what it was until we went back over to the Pentagon to clear stuff out. I remember something hitting me, but it didn't make sense because it was rubber and I wasn't expecting that to be coming out of the ceiling. So I hit the pillar, made my proclamation, turned and looked out the window, and all I saw was orange; an indescribable, brilliant, intense orange. ADMIRAL RICHARDSON came out of his office and yelled at everyone. Several people started panicking and screaming. He told everyone to stand fast, get our wits about us. Once again in my usual fashion, I said, "Stand fast my ass. I'm getting out of here!" I grabbed my sunglasses -- no Naval Aviator would go anywhere without their sunglasses -- left my reading glasses, but I grabbed my sunglasses, which got broken on the way out -- I'm still mad about that but -- we just kind of started filing out. I remember chuckling to myself that it reminded me of the fire drills we used to run in school. Somehow, in my own little head, envisioned all of us at the third grade level, toddling out of the building and having [REDACTED] [REDACTED] standing on the outside yelling at us to hurry up and do it faster. We just kind of toddled out. Two of the secretaries were very, very agitated, upset, screaming, hysterical. People were trying to get them calm and get everybody moving. We came out of the C over again to that door where we all had to exit. I remember thinking that I'm trained. I'm a Naval Aviator. Done this before. We're supposed to make a sweep to make sure everybody's out of the

spaces, close all the doors behind us, turn off all the computers, and do all of that stuff. I said, "I maybe should make a sweep back through the D-Ring and make sure everybody's cleared." I turned to look down there and it was just black, billowing smoke. It was actually the first time I had ever seen what I describe as billowing smoke. It was actually moving and rolling. CAPTAIN HART and one of the secretaries from his division came out of this black smoke and I looked at him and I said, "CAG [phonetic], is everybody out back there?" He said, "Yeah, everybody's out." I said, "That's good enough for me!" I headed out.

We got out into the passageway and I never looked again to the right, the right being the E-Ring, I just turned left. I knew that was where the escalators and the stairways were so that was the way I headed. As we started to walk down the passageway, a mob of people, a massive mob of people -- they had installed fire doors, which we did not know, in the walls of every half center. The firewalls started coming out of the wall and, I would say, I panicked at that point. I looked at this wall as it was starting to close, and I turned around to look to see if we had another way to go out and all I could see was the E-Ring just engulfed in black smoke. I don't think I saw flames. I just knew it was much brighter than had been the black smoke that was coming out on the inside of the office. I don't know that I saw flames. It was bright but black and I knew we weren't going that way. I ran up and tripped the safety on the door and turned around and yelled at everybody to hurry up before these stupid doors shut on us. They still tease me about how big my eyes are when I'm scared. Then the second door started to close and I ran up and tripped that one.

Q. (28:15.5) How did you know to do that?

A. I don't know. I just didn't want those doors to close. At that point, I really felt like we were going to get trapped inside of there if those doors closed. Probably would not have scared me so much had, when I turned around, I'd not seen all that black wall of smoke and knew that we weren't going out that way. So we continued exiting the building. I remember going down the escalator and everyone was walking, of course, down the escalators. They were still running. This lady in front of me a couple of people stopped and was riding the escalator. Somebody said to her, "Keep walking! Please don't stop!" She said, "My foot hurts. I have to stand here." I remember thinking, my goodness gracious, should I pick her up and carry her or what? Then somebody from the Carrier Shop -- because a bunch of us from our office were walking out together and we were talking about how surprisingly orderly everything was going. It was a mass of people! It struck me, at that point, how many people actually were in the Pentagon.

We headed out the second corridor, the main entrance out there into the North Parking. We were in the second corridor probably about at the B-, C-Ring point, when they made an announcement about, "Don't exit through the third corridor or forth corridor. Those exits are closed." I said, "Yeah, closed, they're burning up!" We commented on how surprisingly orderly everything really was going and something about we probably should have practiced something like this, but who would have ever thought we would have to evacuate the Pentagon? Then we talked about, where are we supposed to go? We've never talked about where an assembly point is. So we kind of checked in with each other so we knew who was on their way out of the building so that if they got a hold of any of us, we could give a tally of who we had seen go out with us. Since I was the only one from my office in the Pentagon, my concern at that point became getting my people evacuated out of the building down here in Crystal City.

The cell phones were completely useless at that point. So we continued exiting and I just kept hitting the redial on my cell phone and just kept walking. If I had to walk clear down to Crystal City to tell them to get out of the building, that was what I figured I probably had to do. Then I thought I could use a pay phone, but I'd left my wallet on my desk so I wasn't going to use a pay phone. I just kept hitting the cell phone and walking. I ran into one of the other helicopter pilots, PETE. We were at the edge of the parking lot and we said, "What are we supposed to do? Are we supposed to meet? Are we supposed to muster?" We joked about if we were in the squadron we'd all be formed up. We'd all be taking a muster. We don't really know what we're supposed to do. I said, "Well, I'm going to go down to my office in Crystal City and get everybody out of here and then I'm going to go home. He said, "Yeah, I'm going to do the same thing." I said, "I just want to get home before my son gets home from school. I don't want him to turn on the television and see this on TV." I kept hitting the cell phone. I was across the street under the overpass when, finally, I got through. They didn't even really know anything had gone on yet. They didn't have the news on or anything. They had heard something had happened in New York. I said, "Something had happened at the Pentagon and that they needed to get out of there. Take a head count, get a muster, be able to account for everybody." I have three section heads that work for me. I said, "Make sure all three know where all their people are, even those that are TAD," because I had some people flying that day down to Pensacola. So that's why I wanted them to find where all the people were and then get home, "Call me at my house when you get home," the three section heads, "and give me a muster for everybody in your section."

Then my next concern became getting a hold of my family because I knew they would hear it on the news and they knew I worked in the Pentagon and I didn't want them to be worried. So I just kept, again, hitting the redial. My sister's phone number was programmed into my cell phone so I just kept pushing it; probably walked a mile. Got through to my sister in Alaska. She had already been called by her mother-in-law. She was pretty hysterical. I said, "I'm okay. I don't want to tie up the cell phone right now. I want to get a hold of [REDACTED]'S school, but if the school calls you, because you are the point of contact, tell them I'm okay." Then I kept hitting the cell phone again to try to get a hold of my son's school. I got the library. They couldn't transfer me. I said, "Yeah, I think you can transfer me. Transfer me up to the front office!"

Q. (33:41.2) How old is your son?

A. He's in sixth grade.

Q. (33:44.1) Where is he in school?

A. He was at school.

Q. (33:46.1) What school?

A. Oh, Hayfield Elementary School in Alexandria. So, I finally got through to the front office. It was a voice I didn't recognize. My son knows all the people in the front office. He's spent some special time on the chair in the corner, so everybody knows him. I didn't recognize the voice but I said, "This may not make a lot of sense to you right now. I don't know how much of the news you've been watching, but this is [REDACTED]'S mom, JOAN ZITTERKOPF. I work in the Pentagon and I want you to get word to him that I'm okay." The lady said, "[REDACTED] who?"

I said, "Man, you're new there aren't 'cha?" She laughed and she said, "What grade is [REDACTED] in?" I heard one of the ladies, who I know, in the background scream, "Is that [REDACTED] [REDACTED]'S mom? Is she okay?" I said, "Just get word to him that I'm okay." Then I hung up my cell phone and all of a sudden my knees started shaking. It was like an uncontrollable shiver throughout my body. I had to sit down on a park bench in front of the Post Office. I sat there and shook, I don't know, for a couple of seconds. It wasn't that big a deal, but it was the first time I realized that suddenly it had hit me what had happened.

Then it dawned on me that I had no wallet and I had no way home. Actually, I had not rode the bus that morning. I drove to the metro station because my car was at the metro stop. I said, "Well, I'll just keep walking. There's got to be a bus stop down here somewhere. Under the circumstances, I can't imagine that a bus driver wouldn't let me on the bus and get me headed towards the mall so that I could get home." Thought about calling a couple of people but realized that the traffic was so intense that there was no way that anyone was going to get out to meet me. I was just walking down the street and pondering what had occurred. Ran into a lady about my age, exceedingly well-dressed, beautiful, gorgeous, business suit-type lady carrying a briefcase. She said, "Excuse me. Are there any hotels near here?" I said, "Well, the hotels are back that way." We were down Route 1 at this point in Crystal City. She said, "Well when we left the airport, they told us not to go to Crystal City, that there was still another airplane out there and they thought Crystal City might be a target, so don't go that way. I said, "Airplane, my goodness gracious, where are you from?" She said, "New York City." I said, "Oh, goodness, where?" She said, "The 104<sup>th</sup> floor of the World Trade Center." I said, "Come on, I'll get you to a hotel. Wherever I find a bus, I'll get you to a hotel. Just keep walking with me." So we walked a few

feet further and one of the Petty Officers that worked for me pulled up along side and, “COMMANDER, do you need a ride?” I said, “Yeah, I sure do.” I said, “Can my friend have a ride?” I said, “By the way, what would your name be?” She said, “GAYLE.” I said, “Can GAYLE have a ride, too?” We got in the car and he gave us a ride down to the metro station. It took us a couple of hours. I think it took about two hours to get down there. Picked up my car, then asked her what she wanted to do. She said she really didn’t know what she wanted to do. I said, “Well come on over to my house. I don’t want to drop you off at a hotel. You shouldn’t be alone right now.”

She came over to the house. Several military people live in the neighborhood so several people stopped by and were very happy to see my car at home. She was very taken aback by the close knit community and how many people stopped by to check and how quickly we knew who else of our friends were in that part of the building. She said, “You guys act as if you’re almost trained for this.” I said, “Well, in some ways we are. I don’t think we were trained for it to happen to us at the Pentagon, but our whole careers we grow up knowing that accidents happen and we need to know where everybody is, etc.”

Not that this matters on Naval history but I have to put a plug in for our school. I was very impressed. There were a couple of military spouses in the school. They called them together and said, “What do we do?” Not knowing whether their own spouses had been involved, not knowing what of the children had been involved, etc., and not really sure what to do, so they put their heads together, came up with a plan, called in all the PTA volunteers that they could possibly assemble, and prior to loading the children on the bus, they put a volunteer in every classroom for every military child in the room and made the announcement that there had been a

dreadful accident; that two airplanes had flown into the Trade Center, that one had attacked the Pentagon and if you were a military child and your parent worked in the Pentagon, you had to see a PTA volunteer before you were allowed to board the bus. They said they did not want anyone to go home to an empty house. So as long as -- like I had called and said I was at home, so they allowed my son to board the bus and come home. If the children did not know that one of their parents was at home, they were not allowed to get on the bus and go home by themselves. Which, I thought, was exceedingly caring of the school, to take that much time to worry about our children that much.

Then, didn't sleep that night at all. I live fairly near the Coast Guard station in Alexandria, near Ft. Belvoir, and there was a lot of helicopter traffic that night in and out. I'm not really sure what they were doing, but a lot of search and rescue type helicopters. Of course, I can't sleep anytime there's a helicopter overhead, but also, a lot of fighter traffic. The one time I did try and lay down to go to sleep -- I'm under the flight path for National Airport and the one time I did try and lay down to go to sleep, I woke up very startled when a fighter went overhead. Later when I tried to describe it to my son, he said, "But Mom when we lived in Italy we heard that kind of noise all the time and it felt good to hear it. Why did it bother you?" I said, "Because I never expected to hear a fighter in my hometown," that in America we were exempt from that. The following night, again, didn't sleep well because the fighters just really -- it was a wrong noise. It wasn't supposed to be there.

On the 12<sup>th</sup>, we weren't really sure what we were supposed to do. They had called that night to get a head count, muster and make sure everyone was accounted for. When they called me, I said



everyone in my branch was accounted for. "What about the other branches?" CDR NEILSON [phonetic], the Assistant EA, gave me kind of a funny answer and he said, "We're still calling." When I hung up I was very concerned about the ADMIRALS who had been out in the E-Ring, because from the pictures, it certainly appeared as if the office in which they had been in, probably had been severely damaged. His response of not telling me everyone was okay agitated me a lot. I wanted to hear everybody was okay. When I went in that morning, I still -- not on the 12<sup>th</sup> -- had a very strange feeling that something had happened to the ADMIRAL but, of course, nothing had. They had evacuated safely.

We hung around the house for a while on the 12<sup>th</sup>, not really knowing if we were supposed to go in or not or what we were supposed to do. I called the three section heads in my office and said, "Let's go ahead and go to work, get our office stood up." Since we were in Crystal City and unimpacted we could get our computers and everything running so that people could come down and use our spaces if need be. So we did. We kind of wandered around the office not knowing really what to do. Nobody was calling us from the outside. So we really were kind of frustrated; feeling like we should be doing something, but weren't really sure what we should be doing. Then they called me and said that they were having an Admirals meeting with all the B-Codes in another building in Crystal City where NAVAIR was. So we all mustered down there. I left all my people back in our office in Crystal City and went down and we, again, searched around. We were dumbstruck, at least I was, by the fact that finding pens and paper -- we didn't have anything! We knew we didn't have our files. We knew we didn't have the work that had been on our desk, but somehow searching for a pen to write with just seemed very strange at that point. They made an office run, got pens and paper so we could all write. We didn't really know what

we were supposed to be writing, I don't think, but we had something to write on and that made us feel better. We worked hard that day to figure out where everybody was, what was going on, whether or not we could come up with a way to telecommute until security could be improved at the buildings, etc., how we could keep functioning knowing that, in today's world with computers and everything, there should be a way to operate from your home, etc. I always felt like I was in a strange little position because everyone who worked for me had all their stuff and I had nothing. Every time I wanted to refer back to a point paper or something, I had to go into their files instead of into my files. I felt very, very naked almost without my stuff, especially without my reading glasses.

A couple of weeks later when they did allow us to go into the Pentagon to get our personal stuff, I was very happy to get my reading glasses because I could see again.

Q. (45:26.2) Tell us about life since. What has changed, both professionally and personal?

A. We're still, even though we've gotten our stuff back out of the Pentagon, there's still kind of a gap in there. There's a disorganization for a period of time. We have all our stuff and we shouldn't still be disorganized but there's still a couple of weeks in there where you still have to think through what happened in the chain of events on some of the programs, etc., and trying to piece things back together. I think we still feel a little bit unsettled. I think it is compounded by the fact that we know we're moving back into the Pentagon until we have to move again. That's a temporary situation and then we have to move again. It feels very transient. In where, again in the fleet, you're kind of use to that transient "everything in a helmet bag" mode, staff duty isn't

that way. You're supposed to have your files and everything's supposed to be predictable. I think that has been the strangest part for me since then.

I personally feel very cut off from what is going on. I know that we are fighting a war. I know that the Navy is in harms way. My major source of information is CNN. I feel like I should be there and be flying with my shipmates and doing it. So there's a sense of frustration of being of paper pusher and not contributing to the war effort. Personally, there's still times -- I guess call it Post Traumatic Shock Syndrome or something. I'm sure there is a psychiatric word for it -- there's still times where, when I try and relax and close my eyes, I still see that orange. I still smell that smell. The smell of the fire was just intense. Jet fuel, which is a horrible smell for any pilot to smell burning, but it was just so overwhelming. I couldn't get the smell out of my nose for about three days. Every once in a while when I really relax, it comes back, so I guess it's still weighing on my brain. It still bothers me when I hear the fighters and you can tell there must be a certain period of time in which they do orientation flights in between the airline schedules in and out of National because they come over and it is just a wrong noise. I still don't feel it's right in America.

I have lost some of my interest in staff work. I feel very frustrated that I'm bogged down by reams of silly rules when we should be moving things faster in order to support the people on the front line. I feel like, somehow, I'm not in the war. I'm in something that could have happened 10 years ago, just moving more paper work. I've lost some of my glimmer for the Navy. I've started looking at what I'm going to do afterwards, which I had not before. Possibly, if I can get back to feeling like I'm contributing, I hope that changes because I certainly had intended to stay

in the Navy longer. I don't feel like I'm contributing, so I don't feel like I should have the right to wear the uniform.

Q. (50:18.3) How much longer do you have in this job?

A. Two years, three months, eight days, 42 hours, but who's counting? I know this work has to be done, but it sure isn't as fun.

Q. (50:41.5) Your family -- you just have the one son?

A. One son, yes.

Q. (50:45.0) Your husband?

A. I'm divorced

Q. (50:46.5) Divorced?

A. It's just my son. He was interviewed in the Washington Post in the Kid's Section. They did, I thought, a very nice job. They asked for volunteers for military kids from our children's school. I thought very wisely on their part, one of the first questions they asked the school was if anyone had had a parent lost, if any of the children had been impacted by death in the school at all, they didn't want to interview any children in that school. No one in our school had been lost so they interviewed, I think it was, eight military kids. Then called me and asked -- they got a kick out of my son. They asked him something about why he thought other countries hated America and he said, "We were kind of like the Yankees. You either love us or you hate us." That's just the way it is. They got a kick out of some of his thoughts and he gave a very interesting perspective. He

had lived overseas and we'd been in THREATCON conditions. Their school had been evacuated several times due to bomb threats and that this type of thing in his life, while it isn't normal, he had gotten used to it, to some extent. His comment is "and tomorrow the sun comes up and you gotta keep going. So, we can't let this get us down. We just have to keep going!" They enjoyed his interview and they asked if they could photograph him and put him in the paper. They did a very nice job. The lead story was a child whose father was being deployed, then my son's interview, and then a Quaker child who had a very different perspective on war, etc. So, they gave three different perspectives of the war through the eyes of a child.

Q. (52:54.3) Wow! I've never seen that. I would love to get a copy of that for your file that we could include.

A. It was very well done. I thought they asked the children the right questions and gave some information to the kids because I do think some of this is difficult for them to process. I remember when my son's school had bomb threats and they had to evacuate and at the same time we went into "Threat Condition Charlie" so there were armed guards at the gates. They were wearing bulletproof vests at the gate. Many of the children were very agitated and they opted to bring the psychiatrists into the classroom and talk to the children about it. I think that was where he kind of developed the "You don't like it. It isn't the way we want it to be, but you can't let *it* change your life, so you gotta just keep going." I had seen the children at that point process through that. I think our children in America have had to process through that a little bit differently now, too. I was glad he was interviewed and was able to, maybe, give a little bit of insight from their level.

Q. (54:20.7) You mentioned before the interview that you give speeches. Tell us how that started and some background on that.

A. I told you that I was very supported going into the Naval Academy, that my hometown had very much supported me. It kind of came as a shock to me, to some extent. I mean, I knew that it was only the second class of women at the Academy, but some of the animosity; some of the feelings came as a shock to me when I arrived there because it hadn't really been a big deal that I'd been a girl growing up. We had made a big fight with our school board when I was in seventh grade to get women's basketball. We petitioned the school board, went to the school board, did all that, so I guess it was a big deal to some extent, but when we petitioned the school board and fought our case, we got girls basketball. I had always believed that if there was something that wasn't available, you fixed that and that it wasn't a big deal. So I went to the Naval Academy and was kind of surprised by some of the feelings that there were actually people in the world that believed there were things I couldn't do because of my sex. I guess it took people aback that someone from Iowa, not exactly a heart of women's liberation, would feel that way. I realized that I had been brought up in a very even society. Whatever you wanted to do, whatever your talents were, that was what you should do. I went to the Naval Academy and was a little shocked by the negative reaction at times. In many ways, I hunkered down and hid and decided to survive. There were people that were there that didn't want me there. I wasn't going to fight them. I just was going to beat them. That became my defense mechanism. I couldn't say I really fought for anything.

That and the event I told you about earlier where I opened the newspaper and discovered that there had been women from my hometown that had served and I didn't even know it. I was

reflecting to myself that I had graduated from the Academy and could tell you anything you wanted to know about BULL HALSEY [phonetic] and CHESTER NIMITZ and all the heroes, but didn't know anything about the women who had served in World War II. I felt that MCAFFEE [phonetic] and some of the other women, I should know their history as well. I started reading the few things I could get my hands on at that point in time, which isn't that much, paperbacks, sometimes through the Marine Museum, and some other places. Then after getting my wings out in San Diego, a group called the Silver Salts asked me to speak about my experience at the Naval Academy. JILL HAWKINS, class of '80, and I were both asked to be guest speaker and speak about our experience at the Naval Academy. Begrudgingly, I did it, not really sure why they wanted to hear from me. Until I got there and talked to some of the people ahead of time and realized that it was an entire room full of World War II Veterans and also some Korean War-vintage Veterans, but the group had been established by World War II veterans. I told them before my speech that I should be listening to them, not the other way around. One of them patted me on the head and said, "No, but you can thank us. We'd like to hear what a difference we made." I looked at it as these had been the women who had paved the way for our opportunity and that I needed to show them what opportunities were available that hadn't been to them. I ad-libbed my speech on the fly, changed it slightly and tried to tilt it towards the opportunities that were available at that point in time. Being a female 53-Pilot was pretty cool and I thanked them for that opportunity. A couple of them in particular, but they kind of adopted me. None of them had children. They were not allowed to marry so they didn't have children. They called me their granddaughter and invited me to many events. I got the opportunity to meet several very amazing women and enjoyed their histories. I realized that I should be writing them down, but being the lousiest writer in the world, I didn't do that. So, I

just kind of spent time getting to know them to the point when my mom came out to visit, they hosted a party for their daughter's visit, because if I was their granddaughter, that had to be their daughter. My mother, I think, was very touched by the fact that these women felt like they had made a difference in my life when they really hadn't even known me, but they had made a difference. They've stayed in touch with them ever since. My son has been the most spoiled, rotten child in the world because he has multiple great-grandmothers. They all look to him as their grandson and send him books about airplanes and about the Navy and about the Army and anything they can send him to encourage him to read.

Shortly after that, I was asked to speak at a Women's History Month event and I didn't really know what to talk about. I was inspired by that event and realized that everyone has a history to tell and that if you don't record it, you start forgetting it and that when you go, it is forgotten forever if it is not recorded somewhere. So I did the speech about history and the days gone by. It was told by word of mouth and it was far more personal. Now we read it through the eyes of an editor who captures a little piece of it. I've been intrigued by the things on CNN about the history books that are going to print as we speak and how they're trying to capture September 11<sup>th</sup> while it is still a wound and that that's hard to record in history, particularly in books that will be read for the next 10 years. So, in my speech I encourage people that if someone touched their life, whether it was a mom, or a sister, or an aunt, or a school teacher, or whoever it might be, but that they should learn that person's history and make sure that it is recorded for posterity because that person made a difference in their life and, therefore, made a difference in history. I encourage people always to tell a child their history. While it may not be very exciting to them, it is history.



Spent Thanksgiving with a friend's father who is a World War II Veteran Bomber Pilot out of England. He made, I believe, 32 runs over Germany. He can't hear a thing, but his mind is functioning completely clearly, so you have to write everything to him. Last Christmas while we were there, he pulled out a box of photos, a shoe box full of wrinkled up photos. He had had the photographers mate for the squadron aboard his crew so every mission he ever made was photographed in great detail. He had shoeboxes full of photos of World War II. As I would pull them out, I would hold one up, and he would look at it and say that's "so and so" and give the guys name and he was from Bullock, Texas, and he had two children and -- just incredible details, so I just started writing and over Thanksgiving we set up the video recorder and got him to just sit and talk and tried to record a little bit of his history because it is incredible the difference in the courage that I believe those men had. He has a hand full of flack [phonetic] that was taken out of his airplane. He has photos of the flack [phonetic] fields that they flew through and to get the courage to go up the next day knowing that that was what you were facing -- I think it is very different. While our fighters of today are still very courageous, you don't fly through flack [phonetic] fields anymore. All that's suppressed prior to us going in. Those men just had incredible courage to continue the war and then, like my uncle, not even come home and talk about it. Whereas today we get to sit and record our history of what happened to us when it's nowhere near the terror that they saw.

So I'm interested in women's history and interested in it from, I think, -- I think it's wonderful that we take the opportunity once a year to recognize Women's History Month. I think it ought to be just history month. Be it male or female and be our influence as male or female matters not,

but that people make a difference and that their history is what made us who we are and that we should recognize that. Those are my thoughts on women's history.

Q. (01:05:20) Well said! Who are some others we can talk to?

A. CAPTAIN RUSH said you talked to him. CAPTAIN JOYCE?

Q. (01:05:33) Talked to him yesterday.

A. Okay, ADMIRAL RICHARDSON who is out of town right now, but he'll be back next week. His secretary?

Q. (01:05:48) SONYA [phonetic]?

A. SONYA [phonetic].

Q. (01:05:49) Yeah, I have talked with her. SONYA THOMPSON [phonetic], right?

A. I don't know her last name. CDR NEILSON [phonetic]?

Q. (01:05:57) No.

A. MONGO [phonetic]?

Q. (01:05:59) No. What's his --

A. He's the Deputy EA to ADMIRAL MCCABE [phonetic].

LT TURNER? He's the Aid.

CHIEF PAPPION [phonetic]? CHIEF PAPPION's [phonetic] the one who got the phone call that morning. He'd be a good one.

Q. (01:06:24) From the Command Center?

A. Yes. MR. ROSENTHAL [phonetic]?

Q. (01:06:35) Who's he?

A. He's the SES in our office, RYAN ROSENTHAL [phonetic]. He's leaving in a couple of weeks. He had an intern for the day up from NAVAIR with him. He had introduced me to her just shortly before the accident happened. I think she was a little devastated by the events and really wishing she hadn't been there that day.

Q. (01:07:19) Is there anything that you want to add that we haven't asked you about?

A. I think you've probably got enough, huh? I can't think of anything.

Q. (01:07:30) Tell us your maiden name, the name at the Academy.

A. SKELLENGER.

Q. (01:07:35) Spell it for us.

A. S-K-E-L-L-E-N-G-E-R. Thank you much for doing this.

Q. (01:07:46) Well thank you. Thank you for what you're doing for Naval history, in particular, the women in Naval history and the impact. You could tell just from the comments you said

about your son, what his reaction is, you've done an incredible job with him, for a sixth grader to have that maturity.

A. I think having made eight moves in the military by the time you're 10 years old and living overseas twice and, etc., I think the military exposes you to some maturity quickly.

Q. (01:08:19) Yes, it sure does. Thanks.

END OF TRANSCRIPT

Transcribed by:  
K. Lacik  
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