

**Navy Liaison Office**  
*Port Mortuary, Dover Air Force Base*

**After Action Report**

In response to the Pentagon attack of 11 September 2001, a Navy presence was established at Port Mortuary, Dover Air Force Base from 13 September through 14 December 2001. The overall objective of the Navy Liaison Office (NLO) was to serve as the link between the Port Mortuary/Armed Forces Medical Examiner's Team and numerous other offices for all affairs associated with the processing, identification, and preparation for shipment of the remains of the 55 Navy casualties. The specific functions & responsibilities of the NLO are detailed in *Appendix A*.

The following summarizes the observations, lessons learned, and recommendations should the Navy have the unfortunate situation ever again of being presented with a mass casualty of this magnitude.

**OFFICE STAFF COMPOSITION**

The Navy Personnel Command (NPC), Naval District Washington (NDW), the Navy Mortuary Affairs Office, and the Office of Navy Chaplains provided personnel to the NLO to address the specific details of their respective responsibilities. The NLO comprised one Captain (O-6), one Master Chief Petty Officer (E-9), one First Class Petty Officer (E-6 Personnelman), two Hospital Corpsmen Morticians (HMC and HM1), and two Navy Chaplains (various ranks). Additionally, two agents from the Naval Criminal Investigation Service (NCIS) were assigned to the Port Mortuary but were not specifically part of the NLO. The NCIS agents did coordinate with NLO and pertinent information was shared as required.

Although the NLO Team was ushered together from several commands in quick stead, including Naval Reservists, it proved to be a very cogent decision on the part of the Navy senior leadership. Although it was a fairly "senior" team, the seniority proved to be of particular benefit during the early weeks of operation:

- ✓ A senior Officer-In-Charge (OIC) provided overall coordination and initiated effective external communications with more than 38 offices and agencies (see *Appendix B*).
- ✓ A Master Chief Petty Officer (MCPO) and Assistant OIC (AOIC) addressed the myriad of details associated with the Port Mortuary Staff (see *Appendix C*) as well as with other offices.
- ✓ A senior Petty Officer knowledgeable in his rate organized and established the office, and assisted with a plethora of administrative details.

- ✓ Two Navy Morticians (HMs) provided professional mortuary support to the Dover Port Mortuary, the CACOs and escorts, as well as provided guidance to the OIC regarding Navy mortuary affairs.
- ✓ Two Navy Chaplains (all were Reservists) provided around-the-clock stress counseling to the Port Mortuary Staff and were available to assist distraught Navy escorts and any next-of-kin who could have visited Dover in the aftermath of the tragedy.

Although the team that came together to comprise the NLO staff proved to be very effective, except for the HM morticians and one person having been a CACO, there was little to no prior experience with casualty or mortuary affairs among the staff. Regardless, the unified team was capable of resolving issues and establishing appropriate procedures and clarifying policies/regulations with minimal inefficiency.

Since the Pentagon attack occurred within NDW, a senior officer was selected and assigned by Commandant, NDW to serve as the OIC. In retrospect, during the USS Cole tragedy, a representative from CINCLANTFLT would have been beneficial to ALCON in the capacity of OIC @ Port Mortuary.

After the initial establishment of the NLO and resolution of any significant issues (perhaps 3 weeks into the evolution), the NLO staff could adequately consist of an O-5, E-7 or E-8, an E-5 YN or PN, and possibly only one HM mortician (depending on the number of casualties).

#### **Recommendations:**

- ✓ In cases of mass casualty involving Navy personnel, and each mass casualty situation is different based on the overall complexity of the casualty situation (i.e. location of the casualty, the number of victims involved, whether or not the victims are "known", and the nature of the casualty (explosion, fire, etc.)), it is highly recommended that a NLO be established at Port Mortuary. The Port Mortuary is not adequately staffed to handle all of the affairs associated with a high number of casualties, particularly when there are so many external offices and agencies involved.
- ✓ NPC (PERS-6) establish a Navy Casualty Liaison Office Det within their Reserve Unit. The members of this Det should be completely knowledgeable of Navy casualty and mortuary affairs and trained on the necessary procedures. These personnel should be ready to stand-up operations @ Port Mortuary with 24 hours notice and should be on-site within 48 hours of the time of the casualty occurrence. The Det should consist of two NLO teams so that there is adequate back-fill.
- ✓ NPC consider reassigning the Navy's HM Mortician rating to the Naval Reserve and establish Reserve billets in designated nationwide Naval Reserve Hospital Units, as well as 2-3 billets with the Navy Liaison Office Det. Strong consideration should be given to establishing a permanent HM Mortician billet at Port Mortuary.

- ✓ The NLO Staff should be rotated approximately every 6-8 weeks, with consideration of reducing the seniority of the Staff at the first rotation.
- ✓ All members of the NLO Staff should undergo post-traumatic stress counseling, and appropriate treatment as required, regularly during the casualty and particularly upon completion of the mortuary effort. The periodic counseling during the course of the casualty and mortuary work could be accomplished by the assigned Navy Chaplains.

### OFFICE SPACE, EQUIPMENT & SUPPLIES

The Port Mortuary facility is not currently configured to provide Service-specific spaces to accommodate Liaison Office staffs in support of mass casualty situations. The office space provided to the Navy and Army was inadequate in terms of size, equipment, and privacy. The Navy and Army shared an office space of a size suitable for 4 personnel, not the 9-10 that were typically present in the office, not to mention the additional escorts who were often present awaiting final preparation of remains for shipment. The noise level in the office from the 4 phone calls and other conversations that were typically transpiring at any one time made any discussions oft times unreasonably difficult. A new facility has apparently been approved for modernization but any subsequent liaison team needs to come prepared to stand up a completely independent office.

The Director, Port Mortuary would not authorize an additional fax machine to be installed in the NLO. This exacerbated the efficient transfer of essential data and too often resulted in the loss of vital information.

The inadequate number of phone lines and the DSN and long distance restrictions placed on the phone lines also created unnecessary complications in communications, hampering the daily routine of contacting CACOs and other key point of contacts for arranging escorts, ordering uniforms, and other essential calls.

### **Recommendations:**

- ✓ Influence the design and development of the new mortuary facility so that adequate office space is allocated to each Service. Once completed, furnish and equip the NLO with essential items that are not portable (i.e. 5 work stations (at least one work station with a Dover network computer ( [REDACTED] ), 5 phones/phone lines (each with unrestricted long distance and DSN access), 1 fax line (with DSN access), 4 modem lines, cable television (for CNN), copy machine, etc.).
- ✓ Establish a list of essential items and equipment to include in a "fly away" kit for the initial NLO team to bring to Port Mortuary. This "fly away" kit should minimally include:
  - Instructions and other documents pertinent to Navy and Joint casualty affairs policies and mortuary procedures

- Government credit card w/ authorization to purchase required equipment, uniforms, and awards
- Fax machine
- 4 laptop computers with complete software packages (including CD-R/W capability)
- Color printer, printer cartridges (both color and B&W), and printer cables (for multiple port connections)
- 3 Cell phones (with nationwide access)
- 4 Walkie-talkies
- 2 Power strips & 3 extension cords
- 4 Phone line couplers & 4 phone line extension cords
- 5 boxes of blank CDs and 3 ½” disks
- Basic office supplies

### COMMAND RELATIONSHIPS

The NLO coordinated information flow among more than 190 personnel assigned to approximately 38 different offices and agencies (see *Appendix B*).

#### **Recommendation:**

- ✓ PERS-6 establish clear lines of authority and responsibility for the NLO.

### PORT MORTUARY COORDINATION

There was a definite bottle-neck within the Port Mortuary regarding the flow of information and the accurate documentation of victim identification details. There were many “Standard Operating Procedures” employed by the Director, Port Mortuary that were unreasonable and that required unnecessary exchanges in order to overcome.

#### **Recommendations:**

- ✓ Continue to authorize the direct exchange of all information from the Director, Port Mortuary to NLO, in particular the status of remains as determined by the Senior Medical Examiner.
- ✓ In cases of mass casualty where multiple services are victimized, establish a Joint Military Coordinator for the Port Mortuary operation. The Director, Port Mortuary would be subordinate to this individual. The Joint Military Coordinator would be responsible for organizing all Mortuary affairs so that the requirements for information would be clearly identified and the current status of remains and other pertinent details are properly disseminated and in a timely manner. The Joint Military Coordinator would manage “expectations” and would also ensure accurate accountability of all records and identification details, such as –
  - Service status of each casualty

- Records receipt and requirements
- Personal effects disposition
- Status of remains
- Communications with primary Joint office
- Exchange of information with the Senior Medical Examiner
- Other specific issues and concerns

## COMMUNICATIONS & COORDINATION

There were frequent phone calls between Navy Comm Cell, NDW and NLO inquiring about issues previously discussed with the off going shift. The majority of questions could have been reduced or eliminated if communication was effectively conducted during watch shift turnover and key personnel received it.

Additionally, there were too many instances (i.e. medical/dental/DNA data needs, normal disposition forms, options for disposition of partial remains, death certificate data, autopsy report procedures, etc.) where CACOs were not aware of key information that needed to be conveyed to the PNOKs; "report back" would cause follow-through of this information, resulting in the PNOKs being aware of all important information in a timely manner.

Once the flow of information was established from NLO to Navy Casualty Headquarters (Navy Comm Cell) and then out to the Regional Coordinators and onto the CACOs, it was essential for the CACOs to then call NLO for professional mortuary advice and coordination of movement of remains. This process worked out very well, reducing misinformation and redundancy in information exchange.

Information disseminated to the PNOKs at the daily briefings held at the Joint Family Assistance Center (JFAC) were not known to the NLO. The minutes from these briefings would have been of high value to NLO. Although we were being informed by the Navy Casualty Office, other important information was being passed in the daily JFAC briefings that was haphazardly conveyed to NLO.

### **Recommendations:**

- ✓ Establish "report back" requirements for all vital information that is directed for dissemination to the victims' Primary Next of Kin (PNOK).
- ✓ Create a Navy (possibly a Joint) website where all pertinent casualty information can be posted on a daily basis. Portals could be placed on this website for all Service-specific information.
- ✓ Include the NLO in the Navy's daily casualty coordination meetings. At a minimum, the NLO could be included via conference call.

- ✓ Provide a written summary to the NLO of any joint casualty (i.e. Joint Family Assistance Center) meetings that occur.
- ✓ NLO should be provided with work, home and 24-hour cell phone numbers for all CACOs. Direct communication between these parties is essential.
- ✓ An overview of escort duties should be provided to each Command designated to provide escorts so that the escorts would have a preliminary understanding of their responsibilities, particularly concerning uniform requirements.

## REPORTS

There were as many databases being used to track the information of each casualty as there were offices involved with the affairs of the victims. Additionally, there were many errors (i.e. spelling of names, SSNs, prior active or reserve military service, etc.) in the various databases that caused significant confusion for many weeks.

### **Recommendations:**

- ✓ PERS-6 serve as the central office to validate the accuracy of all database information.
- ✓ Use a standard database similar to the Defense Casualty Information Processing System (DCIPS) for “one stop shopping” of all information associated with the casualties. If all services utilized one database via server connection, or via website with password protection, and controlled real time update, all updates would be recorded for every organization to retrieve and disseminate as needed. The wasted man hours scrambling for lost or misplaced files would be reduced. With the full implementation of DCIPS, all casualty data tracking would be ready and available for administrative personnel to accurately process shipments of personnel effects, escort and primary expenses to death certificate delivery.

## DISPOSITION OF REMAINS

The decision to authorize the release of partial remains was essentially “delegated” to the NLO. This decision was made, and appropriate options derived, due to requests from PNOKs and Congressional staffers on behalf of the PNOKs. When the decision was made to do so, the Commander, Navy Personnel Command and the Director, JFAC were not informed. This resulted in incorrect information being disseminated to the PNOKs and other confusion.

### **Recommendation:**

- ✓ When it is obvious that intact remains will not be the case, PERS-62 must immediately address the policy and procedures/options for the disposition of partial remains, rather than react to requests from PNOKs and Congressional staffers.

## AWARDS

Obtaining an accurate list of awards for each of the deceased was extremely difficult. On several occasions, the validated list of awards for an individual changed the day of shipment, causing unnecessary delays.

### **Recommendations:**

- ✓ OPNAV N1 coordinate the approval of both the end of tour and other posthumous awards and promotions/advancements with the Commands of the deceased and provide this information in writing to NLO so that the remains can be properly prepared.
- ✓ NPC provide to the Regional Coordinators and the CACOs a summary of awards as documented in the records of each of the deceased with a request for the CACO to have the Command of the deceased validate the list of awards.

## DEATH CERTIFICATES

There were unnecessary delays in the completion of the Commonwealth of Virginia death certificates caused by the initial delay in understanding the process and disseminating procedures for collecting the necessary information, and the provision of inaccurate and incomplete death certificate data by the Regional Coordinator(s) and CACOs.

### **Recommendations:**

- ✓ PERS-62 assume the responsibility to immediately identify the offices and agencies involved with the processing of official death certificates, coordinate with these offices on the most efficient process for completing the death certificates, and immediately promulgate the necessary procedures to accomplish the effort.
- ✓ Develop a concise template to obtain the death certificate data and provide clear instructions on the specific information that is needed.

## CHAPLAIN SUPPORT

Religious rites associated with the deceased were a reaction. The Chaplains should be proactive in addressing the expectations of each religion.

### **Recommendations:**

- ✓ Assign both a Protestant and a Catholic Chaplain to the NLO at the outset. Both should be knowledgeable of rites associated with other religions and be prepared to counsel the NLO on these requirements and expectations.

- ✓ Develop a list of rites for deceased and wounded that is practiced and expected by each religion and include that information in the NLO "fly away" kit.

### PERSONAL EFFECTS

The oversight of the disposition of personal effects by the Port Mortuary Staff is questionable. There were several instances where items of emotional value to the PNOK were designated by the Port Mortuary Staff for destruction. It required the direct intervention, and subsequent oversight, of the NLO Staff to ensure that the proper disposition was being assigned to the personal effects associated with the Navy victims.

#### **Recommendations:**

- ✓ NLO Staff establish an internal procedure to inspect the personal effects associated with all Navy victims to ensure proper disposition and to, as much as possible, ensure the return of valuable items to the PNOK in the most expeditious manner possible.
- ✓ PERS-62 address the issue of personal effects that were not associated with any casualty victims and how best to advertise the existence of these items to the PNOKs so that these items (some of which are of great value, both emotionally as well as monetarily) may possibly be "reunited" with the proper victims and returned to the PNOKs of those victims.

### MEDICAL & DENTAL RECORDS

The significance of quickly getting the medical records, dental records, panorex's, DNA samples, and other medical history (major surgeries, bone fractures, etc.) to the Senior Medical Examiner cannot be overestimated, particularly in a situation where all victims are not military. Furthermore, the accountability for forwarding and receipting for these records is essential in order to prevent unnecessary contact with PNOKs and other family members of the victims. There were major issues with the accountability and documentation of the receipt of records at Port Mortuary.

#### **Recommendations:**

- ✓ All records of designated Navy victims should be forwarded directly to the NLO Staff for proper receipt, who will in turn document and deliver the records to the Medical Examiner's team.
- ✓ The Navy presence at the local (on-scene) assistance center maintain a detailed record of all requests for records (including the requests for DNA samples from family members of the victims) and other medical documentation, and the forwarding of records and medical information to the NLO.
- ✓ Essential medical and dental information be added to the PNOK interview sheet so that the CACO can ascertain immediately the availability of medical & dental records and ask the necessary questions regarding DNA and major surgeries.



**Navy Liaison Office**  
*Port Mortuary, Dover Air Force Base*

**Functions & Responsibilities**

- Act as on-site Navy representative for all actions in support of the identification, processing, preparation, and shipment of Navy casualties; provide a daily status of all actions and issues
- Serve as link between the Medical Examiner team / Port Mortuary staff and external Navy Casualty Affairs offices, primarily the Navy Casualty Center at the Navy Personnel Command (PERS-62)
- Assist with requirements for the processing and the identification of remains; coordinate the location of necessary records and other pertinent data and the prompt forwarding of information to the Medical Examiner team
- Advise Casualty Assistance Calls Officer (CACO) on details of Navy provisions for preparation and shipment of remains and reimbursement for funeral expenses
- Identify specific religious requirements (last rites, caskets, autopsies, other ceremonies, etc.) for each casualty and make appropriate arrangements to comply with the Primary Next of Kin's (PNOK) wishes
- Coordinate with the designated CACO all requirements for preparation and shipment of remains to the satisfaction of the PNOK
- Prepare the remains of Navy casualties for shipment (flags, uniforms, awards, cremation, etc.) in accordance with the desires of the PNOK
- Arrange for Navy escorts for the transportation of all Navy remains; brief escorts on the details of their assignment
- Arrange through Port Mortuary for the shipment of remains to PNOK
- Coordinate the return of personal effects (PE) - cash/coin, high value, and less valuable; ensure accountability for all PE
- Provide death certificate information to Port Mortuary; track the completion of the death certificate and its forwarding to the appropriate state registrar
- Assist all related activities and offices with any requirements that would expedite the delivery of Navy remains to the PNOK
- Ensure that all necessary offices and associated databases remain abreast of changes in status of Navy victims (active duty/Reserve/Retired, posthumous promotions and awards, etc.)
- Maintain all concerned abreast of progress with autopsy reports and other official documentation; obtain details of remains when requested by PNOK

**Navy Liaison Office**  
*Port Mortuary, Dover Air Force Base*

**Office & Agency Interfaces**

American Airlines  
Armed Forces Institute of Pathology (AFIP)  
Army Casualty Affairs  
Casualty Assistance Calls Officers (CACOs) – 55  
Cemeteries  
Commander, Naval Reserve Force Command Center  
DNA National Identification Laboratory (DNIL)  
Dover Air Force Base  
- 436<sup>th</sup> Command Services Group  
- Lodging  
Federal Bureau of Investigation  
FISC Cheatham Annex, Williamsburg, VA  
Funeral Homes  
Headquarters, U.S. Coast Guard  
Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps  
Joint Family Assistance Center (JFAC) / Pentagon Family Assistance Center (PFAC)  
Joint Personal Effects Depot (JPED), FT. Myer, VA  
Naval Criminal Investigative Service  
Navy Region North East, Groton, CT  
Naval Reserve Center, Ft. Dix, NJ  
Navy Casualty Center, Naval District Washington  
Navy Casualty Office (NPC, PERS-62)  
Navy Command Center (OPNAV N3/N5)  
Navy Communications Cell (PERS-6)  
Naval Computers & Telecommunications Command (NCTC)  
Navy Escorts – 62  
Navy Exchange Services  
Navy Mortuary Affairs, MMSO Great Lakes, IL  
NMHC Portsmouth, VA  
Office of Armed Forces Medical Examiner (OAFME)  
Office of Secretary of Defense, Personnel & Readiness (OSD/P&R)  
Office of Vital Statistics, Commonwealth of Virginia  
OPNAV, Chief of Chaplains  
OPNAV Command Center (N1)  
OPNAV N2  
Port Mortuary, Dover Air Force Base  
Primary Next of Kin (PNOKs) - ~ 7  
Regional Coordinators - ~ 4  
Superintendent, Arlington National Cemetery

**Navy Liaison Office**  
*Port Mortuary, Dover Air Force Base*

**Decedent Items Tracked**

1. Last Name, First Name, MI (very important that all spelling is correct as on birth/marriage certificates)
2. SSN
3. Date of Birth
4. Category (Active Duty, Reserve, Retired, Mil Dep, DoN Civilian, Contractor, Other)
5. Organization
6. Location
7. ID Status
8. Basis for ID
9. Releasable?
10. Intact?
11. Viewable?
12. Religious Preference
13. Special Religious Requirements
14. Medical Record (military & civilian)
15. Dental Record (military & civilian)
16. Panorex
17. DNA
18. Major Fractures & Major Surgeries
19. Awards & Decorations (including posthumous promotions/advancements & awards)
20. Uniform Items (identifying requirements, ordering, inventorying, preparation)
21. Statement of Disposition
22. Requests for Disposition of Partial Remains
23. Casket / Urn Type
24. PNOK / Family Personal Requests (special uniform, items in casket, etc.)
25. U.S. Flag Requirements
26. Cremation Status
27. Status of Remains
28. Death Certificate Information Received
29. Death Certificate Signed & Forwarded to State
30. Death Certificate Forwarded to PNOK
31. Personal Effects (inventory, cleaned, separated)
32. Disposition of Personal Effects (cash/coin, valuables, less valuable)
33. Escort Assignment (orders, berthing, transportation, briefing, etc.)
34. CACO Issues
35. Autopsy Reports
36. Condition of Remains (only on request of PNOK)
37. Partial Remains Reassociation (post-shipment)