

**Naval Historical Center  
Oral Interview Summary Form**

**Interviewers:**

CAPT(S) Carol O'Hagan  
YNCS Kathleen Wright

**Interviewer's Organization:**

Navy Combat Documentation Det 206  
Navy Combat Documentation Det 206

**Interviewee:**

LT Delaroderie

**Current Address:**

[REDACTED]

**Date of Interview:**

7 Feb 2002

**Place of Interview:**

Navy Annex, 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:**

**Interviewee Information:**

1. Born in [REDACTED] TN and raised on the East Coast. His father worked for Dupont and they moved often. His eldest brother went to the Naval Academy and graduated in 1993. He graduated from the Naval Academy in 1997. He went to Orlando at Nuclear Power School but attrited from the program. He has been offered Intelligence Officer program but is instead applying to the SEALs program. He now works at the Office of Naval Intelligence.

**Topics Discussed:**

2. He was the duty officer the weekend of the 7<sup>th</sup> of September for Naval District Washington. It was a long weekend. President Bush visited the Navy Yard on September 10<sup>th</sup> and so he ended up keeping the duty longer than the weekend. He slept well that night and he did not sleep again for two days.
3. He was working in Bldg. 200 at the Naval Yard near ADM Weaver's office when the first plane hit the World Trade Center. After the Pentagon was hit, he and the ADM's aide went to the housing on the base to let the wives know what was going on. The base had shut down. They were in THREATCON Delta. He could see the smoke coming up over the Pentagon. He ran into Barbara McDonald, the regional CACO coordinator. He volunteered to do CACO duties when the need arose. He had been trained and done those duties before.
4. As the day wore on the military was released to go home. He lived in Annapolis, and since he knew he would be a CACO he stayed on the base. He had his choker whites with him and changed into them. At 2000-2100 the CACO's started to trickle in. That first night several of them went around to several families to notify the families.

Normally one CACO is assigned per family, but they were not fully manned yet. He went to the home of LT Darin Pontell and IS2 Johnny Doctor. The commands had already talked to the families so they were expecting them.

5. The first visit required the presence of a Chaplain. They were handed a statement to read to the families. They formed up around midnight and went to the residence with two command reps and a chaplain. The ONI reps were Brian Acker and CAPT Greer. He remained the CACO of the Pontell family. They arrived at 0100; there were many family members inside. He read the statement to [REDACTED] Pontell, Darin's wife. Also present were her parents, his parents, brothers and sisters. His wife was still hopeful, thinking he may be in a hospital or still in the Pentagon. He told her he hoped they would not see him again. That first visit was brief.
6. He made the same notification to the wife of Johnnie Doctor. They lived in base housing on Bolling Air Force Base. It was now 0200-0230, and you could look out over the river and see the Pentagon all lit up with smoke pouring out of it. It was a strange sight to see 18 hours later. Johnnie Doctor's wife was not there, but the garage was open. Her son opened the door asking where his mom was. He explained that they were not sure about his dad's whereabouts, that the Navy was still looking, and that they would return to talk to his mother. They got a call from her; she did not want them to come out at all. Then she changed her mind. At about 0400-0500 he went back over there with one of the Navy chaplains. She was having a very hard time; she had already lost hope. He explained the Dust 1 status to her, and then went back to the Navy Yard. By this point one CACO per family was the rule, and he asked Barbara McDonald if he could stay with the Pontell family. They had both gone to the Naval Academy.
7. During the afternoon of the 12<sup>th</sup> they were declared missing. The CACO's met, were briefed that morning, and told that they wanted them to stay with the families as much as possible until they were kicked out. Late in the morning they were told to go back out to the families. He went back out there with another chaplain and passed on the little information he had. The family turned out to be Jewish, so at this point he started to take out a rabbi with him. Their rabbi was usually at the house, so at this time he stopped taking a chaplain or a rabbi with him. He realized he hadn't eaten or taken a shower in a day and a half. He slept some at home that night, and on Thursday he went back out to the Pontell's home. Sometime that afternoon Darin's mom's cell phone rang, and the missed call came up as Darin's cell phone. It appeared Darin had just tried to call her. He called CAPT Greer to tell him about the cell phone call. [REDACTED] wanted to find out where Darin's car was parked, thinking that perhaps the phone was in the car and had been broken into. He called SPRINT, Darin's cell phone provider, who could give him no information. CAPT Greer had made an attempt to locate Darin's car, and ONI folks were unable to locate it [REDACTED] father [REDACTED] wanted to go look for the car himself. LT Delaroderie and her father went out to the Pentagon, found the car, and could not find the cell phone. She was upset because it was midnight now and there was still no resolution to the cell phone issue. He called the duty officer who talked to the FBI at the scene. Agents from the scene called [REDACTED] to get information. They told them that they had picked up some anomalies with cell phones at the crime scene. They never got a good response; no real explanation as to what happened with the cell phone. LT Delaroderie was there all night Thursday, and on Friday went home to clean up. He slept in his office and slept a couple of hours each night. He showered in the facilities at work, and would sleep in his chair at night. He spent a lot of time with the Pontell's now because he wanted to be with them when the news came of Darin's whereabouts. On the 17<sup>th</sup>, on Monday evening, as he was leaving the Pontell's, he began to get a bad feeling.

The remains had been taken to Dover for identification. He began to think about how he would break the bad news to them. Sometime during the weekend he picked up a book on Judaism to learn about their rules concerning death. They do not want the body to have an autopsy; it should be buried within 24-48 hours; the body can't have any metal on it.

8. Darin's brother Stephen, a naval aviator, had been killed in 1989 in an aircraft mishap. When LT Delaroderie woke up that day, on Tuesday, he knew they would hear something that day. At about 1400 his phone rang and he was told that Darin had been identified at Dover through dental records. He was sitting right there amidst the family. He went outside to make a call and verify the information. He went back into the house – [REDACTED], her mother, and two friends were present. He put his cover on to give her the news. It was the hardest thing he had ever done. Darin's parents were on their way over to the house. He went outside and waited for his parents to show up, and he delivered the news to them. He went back out to the base to get some of his paperwork. He stayed there late; the family did not want him to leave.
9. They told him they wanted to bury Darin quickly, and that the Navy could not do an autopsy. Darin's remains were the first to get shipped back, although they were not the first to get identified. The funeral was Friday, Sept. 21<sup>st</sup>, the first Sept. 11<sup>th</sup> funeral. The Navy's definition of autopsy includes dental records, preparation of remains, and shipment of the remains. There was nothing intrusive done to the body. On Wednesday evening or early Thursday the ONI rep changed. CAPT Tom Breyer went up to Dover to escort the remains home. On Thursday they came up with a funeral plan; the rabbi kept the ceremony within the bounds of Judaism. They came up with a plan that meshed an honorable military service for a fallen comrade with the requirements of the Jewish faith. The family wanted Darin to be buried in his chokers. The remains were shipped in service dress blues. On Thursday he bought an entirely new choker white uniform. At this point he was still a LTJG, although he was posthumously promoted to LT. The casket was brought to the funeral home, and LT Delaroderie opened it to change out the uniforms. Someone forget to tell him that he would be posthumously promoted; the SBD's he was buried with were striped for LT. He only had JG bars there, so he took the LT bars off of his uniform and put the JG bars on himself. On Thursday night the family expressed concern that Darin might get buried with his wedding band or his Naval Academy ring. He called out to Dover and asked what was recovered with the remains. He did not get a definitive answer.
10. Arrangements were made for Friday. ADM Porterfield, the Head of Naval Intelligence, was to present the Purple Heart and the flag to [REDACTED] Pontell. Friday, before the funeral began, he went back out to the funeral home. With the assistance of the funeral home director, he opened the casket and searched his hands for rings. There were none, and he was able to tell the family that there were no rings on his remains. The service was held at their synagogue near Silver Springs, MD. It was well attended. The funeral director arranged a police escort to where the internment was held near Baltimore. It was a real heroes funeral. In the Jewish culture, everyone in the family tosses in the dirt. His widow held herself together very well and was an inspiration to him. Darin's two best friends and LT Delaroderie finished putting the dirt on the grave. [REDACTED] Pontell, Gary's father, had requested the shell casings that were spent at the funeral. LT Delaroderie had to collect them from Ft Meade and take them to the Pontell's residence, where they were having a 7 daylong wake. He paid his respects every night on the wake. He prepared all of the paperwork for [REDACTED] ahead of time and all it required was her signature. After

- the wake was completed they sat down and went through the paperwork. He had also compiled a list of the charities and organizations that were popping up to help.
11. He continues to check in with the family, although the CACO duties have diminished. Personal affects that are unaccounted for are being held by Ft. Meyer. They are printing a catalogue of those affects. Darin is still missing his wedding ring and his academy ring. There was a ceremony on October 13<sup>th</sup> for the “magnificent seven,” the seven who died in the CNO-IP section.
  12. The Family Assistance Center was a very public place. ██████ and her family did not go out there, except for ██████ father who attended it twice before Darin was identified as a casualty. He went there to get information to take it back to ██████ It made his job easier to get the information from a central location. In fact they were given information more than once. The channels of communication at the Navy Yard and through Millington worked.
  13. He is upset that the Pentagon was hit, a symbol of our freedom, and the center of our military.
  14. Lessons learned: this is the third time he has been a CACO. This one was unique because it was a period of time before they knew Darin Pontell was dead. It was harder to separate the humanity of the person because there were thoughts that they might be alive. You leave this situation appreciating your life more.
  15. The individual who called with the notification made the notification while LT Delaroderie was sitting with the family. He wishes that individual had warned him to leave the family before he delivered the news over the phone. He liked the CACO headquarters that were set up downstairs at NDW. JFAC provided one stop shopping for benefits, which was useful to the CACOs as well. The Pontell family did not take advantage of the counseling although they knew it was there. They derived a lot of support from their local rabbi and from friends and family.
  16. Darin’s grandfather was interviewed first and mixed up the grandkids. That interview became widely circulated and that upset her. His secondary duties were to Darin’s parents, and they probably had a hard time that ██████ was the primary next of kin and they were not the recipients of many of the things ██████ received. The Navy covered both the primary and secondary next of kin. All of the other organizations recognized only ██████. Many of the articles focused on the parents because both of their Navy sons were killed; the focus has not been on Darin.

Abstracted by:  
CDR Karen Loftus  
12 Feb 2002

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**Interviewee Information:**

Born in ██████████ TN and raised on the East Coast. His father worked for Dupont and they moved often. His eldest brother went to the Naval Academy and graduated in 1993. He graduated from the Naval Academy in 1997. He went to Orlando at Nuclear Power School but attrited from the program. He has been offered Intelligence Officer program but is instead applying to the SEALs program. He now works at the Office of Naval Intelligence.

**Topics Discussed:**

Q. (2:09) Let's go ahead and go to the day of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Tell us where you were that day and let's start there.

A. Well, it was, you know the Tuesday, and that weekend before I was the original Duty Officer for Naval District Washington. So I spent the whole weekend getting paged and called and everything and it was just you know a long weekend because I was on duty. September 10<sup>th</sup> PRESIDENT BUSH actually came to the Navy Yard to do a ceremony with the Australian Prime

Minister and where we gave them the ship's bell to the *USS CAMBARA*, and so that was a big to do. And I kind of got stuck with, the guy that was supposed to relieve me Monday morning was one of our security officers, and you know he needed to stay involved with PRESIDENT BUSH's visit. So I ended up keeping the duty a little bit longer and we opened up what's called the Regional Operations Center, and that is just a room with a bunch of televisions and computers, you know kind of wired into security system and everything so that the original duty officer can sit there and kind of monitor what's going on, on the yard and everything. I was manning that to, you know, in case anything went on with the PRESIDENT being on the yard you know, so I could help coordinate, you know, any kind of action we'd have to take. And it was ironic, because I think that was the first time we actually used it for not an ac—you know we used it before for drills and exercises, but that was the first time that I understand it was actually used operationally, you know.

So we unlocked the door and went in there and kind of dusted everything off, and checked to make sure everything was working. And it's a good thing we did, because you know we got everything up and running and, you know, the next day when the terrorist attack occurred, you know, of course that was manned and stayed manned pretty much for the next three weeks, you know.

So Monday night when I went home, I was kind of relieved because, you know it had been a long weekend and I could finally get a good nights rest. I'm glad I did, because like many of the other military people in the area, I probably didn't sleep for the next two days.

That morning, you know, once the first plane hit the Towers, you know everybody was still kind of going, "Wow, what a tragic accident!" Nobody kind of really knew what was going on, and

that's when reports started trickling in that some airlines may have been hijacked, and so right away, you know, we kind of knew what was going on.

Q. (04:50) Where were you that day?

A. I was working at Naval District Washington in the headquarters there. The office I was in at the time was actually right down the hall from ADMIRAL WEAVER's office, CAPTAIN CUMMING's office. She's the deputy out there.

Q. (05:05) Building 200?

A. 200, yes. So everything I saw on TV, I actually saw, you know, from the TV in their office so, you know, it was the closest one to me. You know when the second plane hit, we all knew then there's no, there's no guessing then. It was obviously a terrorist attack. It just seemed like minutes later when the Pentagon was hit.

At that point everything was kind of a swarm of activity, lot of people running around. I was looking for something to employ myself with, you know to do. Of course I wasn't part of security force or anything like that, so there wasn't a whole lot for me to do at first. I kind of had to find things to do and what I ended up doing early on was me and the Admiral's Aide, LT REALONUS (phonetic), we went around to all the flag housing on the base, to talk to all the families and the wives. Let them know, you know, what was going on—what we need to go on—what was going on and if we had heard anything from you know, their husbands or wives, you know. These are all flag officers.

The base had shut down, you know. Nobody is coming in. Nobody is going out. We're at condition Delta. So we went around and we're telling all the families, you know that, you know,

we're taking every precaution to ensure the safety of the base. That, you know, we're having a communications problem with the Pentagon, and you know, encourage them to keep their phone lines open, you know, so that they couldn't be encumbering the phone system anymore and that way their husbands or wives could get through to them if they were trying to reach them. Many of them had already heard from their husbands so that was good.

I—so we did that for a while. I went back to my office and a lot of the civilians were having a problem with us not letting them leave the base. And there was one civilian in the hallway yelling at our Deputy Commandant, CAPTAIN CUMMINGS, about how she didn't want to stay here all day with all of us. So I kind of helped steer her away from the Captain who had a lot more important things to do at the time. You know, kind of tried to explain to her that, you know, she was probably safer here than trying to get onto the streets.

At this time, I think they were evacuating Washington DC, and a lot of the federal buildings, it seemed. You know we were kind of getting kind of hazy information, you know, just from what was coming on CNN, and the attention was on the World Trade Centers which had collapsed at this point.

We, it's kind of hard to remember exactly what I was doing.

Q. (07:54) You're doing good.

A. Yes –

Q. (07:57) I have a question. How many people are in residence on the Washington Navy Yard as far as flag officers or whatever? Just approximate.

A. I want to say somewhere probably 15 to 20.



Q. (08:11) OK.

A. We went to several houses. Tag teaming them. You know, of course they were all watching the news. They all knew why we were coming there.

Q. (08:21) Yes, OK.

A. I had done CACO work before so I know that whenever you're in that kind of situation where you see multi-people come up to your door, you kind of start to "Oh, Oh," -

Q. (08:31) Cringe.

A. "What's going on." Luckily at that point, you know, we weren't delivery any bad news of any sort. Then between running around, trying to stay active, you know I was watching some things on the news. They needed somebody to go head up the Military Command Center, I think it's called, here in DC. For some reason we didn't have a Navy guy there, so my people wanted me to go out there. But before I could they got, you know, somebody a little bit higher ranking out there. So that was probably a good deal.

I remember going out to the parking lot at one point to go up to my car. I had some Gatorade or something up there I wanted to grab it, because it looked like it was going to be a long day. And as I went up to—I happened to be parked on the roof, and when I got up on the roof I could see all this smoke filling the skies from the direction of the Pentagon. That was very strange.

Actually had a little disposable camera in my car and I actually took a picture of that. I can't bring myself to get that roll developed yet though. So I was doing, you know kind of running around helping out some of the senior officers, you know, if they need me, go do something, or

pass something on. We were trying to make sure that all the dining facilities stayed open, because a lot of the, you know, at this late in the afternoon they started to release, they started opening the gates to let the civilians leave. There was some concern that there wouldn't be any dining facilities open for the sailors that were staying, you know. So little tasks came up like that, and you know, I was just trying to, you know, find an opportunity at least to help out.

I remember seeing BARBARA MCDONALD who's the regional CACO area coordinator and, you know, I kind of knew that we were going to have some casualties out of this and again I'd done three previous CACO cases before, and I, you know, said, "Hey look, I know, I know we're going to get called, so let me know what I can do to help," and you know. I had no idea what the number was going to be at that point, where, yet, when all of a sudden told, you know, we were bringing in people from outside our area to help out. Nobody kind of knew what to expect.

The—I remember seeing our aircraft up in the air flying, you know, combat air patrols for lack of a better word, you know I'd seen 18s and probably 14s up there streaking overhead, and that made me feel safer.

All things considered, we weren't thinking the Washington Navy Yard was much of a threat, that we'd have a plane come try to crash into us. You know, I figured there'd be a lot more targets than DC. But once we saw those birds in the air I know all of us felt a little bit safer.

We, kind of, you know you kind of lose track of the time, you know. I think everybody was just kind of trying and get a handle on what was going on and, you know, CNN was just kind of giving out just as much information as we were getting anywhere else. So that stayed pretty much on all day. I just remember everybody, as we kind of interacted with each other it was all like, we kept saying things like, you know, "Remember this day, because," you know this—

“things have changed,” and that tomorrow we’d start to, you know, kick somebody’s ass (chuckle) around. Whoever was responsible, you know, we’d start to come back at them. But it was kind of a very unique experience I think for anybody in the military at the time, just because we train a lot for war, but you know we really haven’t happened on our soil, you know. There’s Pearl Harbor, but when was the last time American territories were attacked? So it was very strange in that regard.

But, so as the day kind of went on, you know, and all the flights are grounded, I remember the military started to get kind of released to go home and whatnot, and I was living down in Annapolis at the time and I knew that, you know, we had CACO stuff coming up soon, so you know, it didn’t really seem worthwhile to go back home. So I remember just grabbing something to eat and just kind of hanging out.

Later in the day, I was told that, you know, we’re getting together to start doing casualty calls, where you know, we actually go to people’s houses and start talking to the families. I, for some reason, didn’t have my whites but I had my chokers with me, my formal dress uniform, and so I ended up changing into that.

I had picked up some stuff, I think, probably like from a gas station or whatever, like some razor blades and stuff to kind of clean myself up with, and you know, kind of got ready and was just kind of standing by waiting for everybody else to show up to start doing that. And actually it was about eight or nine o’clock when everybody else came trickling in. There weren’t a whole lot of us at first, and as the night wore on we actually went, you know, went out and did a couple of calls, not just, you know, one call. Typically you have just one CACO officer assigned to a family, but we were so undermanned that that first at least, several of us went around to several families to talk. Just so that everybody could be notified.

Q. (14:26) Do you remember the names of the people, the families that you contacted?

A. Yes, I talked to the family of LIEUTENANT DARIN PONTELL, and that was the family I ultimately stayed with. I also talked to, this sailor IT1 DOCTOR?

Q. (14:56) Yes.

A. And –

Q. (14:57) JOHNNIE DOCTOR.

A. JOHNNIE DOCTOR, yes. And there was one other, but to be honest, I really don't remember the name. What had happened was the commands had already talked to the families to let them know that, people were, you know, they hadn't been able to account for their husbands, wives, sons, daughters, whatever. So they knew already and they knew we were going to be coming out there later in the evening.

Q. (15:29) Now who, did he go out there with, yourself, and – ?

A. Well, the way it works is the first visit at least, you're required to bring a Chaplain with you, and we all kind of got our assignments, but at this point it was close to midnight before everybody kind of got their ducks in a row of what we were required to do. And there was an official statement that was handed to us to read to the families. You know, where we categorized them and they, most called a Dust 1 status, which is "Duty Station, Whereabouts Unknown". And so about midnight we kind of had formed up and we got a chaplain assigned to us and we also were coordinating with, you know, the commands because a Command Rep was coming out with us. In my case, people from ONI. It was one of the co-workers out there that worked with

the people out there. I remember the only Rep I had was a guy named LT ACKER, who was BRIAN AKCER and CAPT GREER. So we kind of, me and the chaplain got a duty driver and a vehicle. We drove out near ONI where we met up with these two ONI reps and drove out to the, LT. DARIN PONTELL's residence, and probably got there about one in the morning. You know, knocked on the door, and door opened and, you know, it's like a room full of people and all of the—I was there primarily to see DARIN's wife, ██████████ PONTELL, and her family, her parents and DARIN's parents and brother were in the room and, you know, I kind of read this statement to ██████████ and, you know they asked us a couple questions, you know. At this point we didn't really have a lot of answers to give back to them.

I remember the Chaplain did a prayer at the time and it was a very, kind of a, you know, it was a nice, general kind of prayer, and –

Q. (18:00) Do you remember what the, were they hopeful at that, I mean what was their state of mind?

A. Yes, they were hopeful. Later I found out that, you know, a couple of things, somebody had told, had called ██████████ and said that they saw DARIN in some other place so she was hoping that maybe DARIN had been just busy, you know, trying to help out and couldn't get through. Tried to call or whatever. You know, she did assume that he was there helping, but as the day kind of stretched on she got more and more worried, to where now, you know, they didn't know if maybe he was in the hospital somewhere or if he was still inside the Pentagon. I know us showing up there didn't help, and I remember telling them that hopefully they would never see me again. You know, hopefully that they would get word that DARIN was OK, real soon, and you know, I wouldn't be back out.

So the first visit there, you know, was kind of real short and brief and we didn't have a whole lot of information. CAPT. GREER was familiar with the Pentagon and apparently familiar with where the CNO IP, CNO Intelligence Plot was located, which is where DARIN was working, and kind of passed that information on to them and they were trying to put together in their heads where it looked like the plane had crashed.

So it was kind of, you know, we didn't have a lot to tell them, and so we were only there maybe a half an hour, and you know, we promised if we heard anything whatever, we'd call them and let them know or come out there and let them know, you know, depending on what it was. And you know, again I told them that I, "Hopefully you'll never see me again."

So then, we left and I went to go make the same notification to the wife of JOHNNIE DOCTOR and that was unusual, because they lived over in base housing, over in Bolling, Bolling Air Force Base. So we drove down 295 from the Navy Yard to go down to Bolling housing, and you know, it was like two o'clock, 2:30 in the morning and across the river there you could see, you know, the Pentagon all lit up and smoke still pouring out of it and that was a very strange sight to see. Just because, you know, this has been, you know this is like three o'clock in the morning at this point and you know the plane had crashed into it, you know, hours earlier like nine o'clock everyone's saying, and you would think that it would have been out by then, but you know, smoke was still coming out. That was little surreal, that didn't seem like, that was almost like I was in a dream seeing that. You know, it was very late, so maybe I was just tired or whatever, but –

So we go to visit JOHNNIE DOCTOR's wife and she's not there. It was kind of a, you know, she knew we were coming over there, and it was three o'clock in the morning. She's not in her house. The garage is open, so obviously, the car's gone. So I kind of like knock on the garage

door a lot and finally like her son kind of comes down and opens up the garage, the door to the garage and I asked him if he knows where his mom's at and, you know, he's not really sure, and I was like, kind of referred him that I wasn't there with bad news, just to explain that you know, were not sure of his father's whereabouts and you know, we're still looking. The Navy is still hopeful, and you know, we haven't given up and that I'd be back later to talk to, to talk to, you know, his mom, and so we left.

In the meantime got a call from her and she didn't want us coming out there at all. Then an hour later she did, and so real late, probably like four o'clock, five o'clock in the morning I finally caught up with her with one of the Navy chaplains. At this point the command representatives from ONI had, you know, they had gone on to do other things, and so just the Chaplain and I went out and talked to her. She was, she was having a really hard time. I think she had already lost hope. You know, she was really having a tough time, you know, with what had happened. So I talked to her, you know, for probably for close to an hour, me and the Chaplain, and again explained the Dust 1 status and talked to them, talked to her, and so real, you know, late in the day or early the next morning, however you want to look at it, we went back to the Navy Yard and, you know at this point they had called in enough people from outside areas that we were going to be able to do one CACO, whether that's a chief or an officer, to each family. I asked BARBARA MCDONALD, our CACO area coordinator to, if she could let me stay with the PONTELL family, the family I had talked to. Mainly because DARIN PONTELL and I went to the Academy. He was a year behind me. I didn't know him, but I kind of felt like, you know, that could have me, and kind of do, and you know that I could kind of relate more to what they were going through, because it was like my age group. And so I did stay with them.

We went out, so this is the morning of Wednesday the 12<sup>th</sup>. You know shortly after getting back to the Navy Yard, we got assigned, and a new statement came out, I want to say at this point we're going to declare them missing. So we, I take that back. I don't think they went missing until later in the afternoon. I think, we kind of met and they kind of gave a brief overview of what was going on to us, you know, all the CACO's in the room. You know, that they wanted us to spend as much time as possible with the families, basically staying with them until they kicked us out, yes, just so that we could show them that the Navy was their extended family and that we were going to be there to support them, help them get through this no matter what happens. There's a lot of you know speculation about survivors and when the last live person was pulled from the wreckage, but you know nothing really concrete and you know, we're getting most of our information from CNN instead of Navy channels anyway.

Q. (25:51) Did you have any sleep by this point.

A. No, I didn't get any sleep for a little bit while longer. So late in the morning they tell us to go back out and visit the families, because a lot of the CACOs had not met the families, you know. Because other people like myself had notified them. So we, you know, went back out there with another chaplain and spent a couple hours there where we just kind of came out there and you know said, "Hey, look," you know, "we haven't heard anything yet. We don't want you to give up hope. We're still searching. We're not going to leave the site until we've accounted for everybody." And just passed on the little information I had. CAPTAIN GREER came out with us, you know the Chaplain was there. He offered a prayer.

Turns out the family I was working with was Jewish and so after this point I sought out Rabbis to come out with me, but fortunately, the PONTELLs, they're very active with their Synagogue



anyway and their Rabbi was out there and continued to remain out there with them for much of the time. RABBI LAYMAN, and we, so I was out there with them, and you know they were just kind of watching the news and you know I was kind of talking to them trying to, you know, not so much take their mind off things, but trying to show them that the Navy was still with them, and that we were still there to support them. Later that afternoon I remember, you know, we probably left about four, five o'clockish and so CAPTAIN GREER and I and the Chaplain we left, and I went back to the base and kind of checked on things and finally made a run back out to Annapolis to where I was staying to, you know, kind of shower and get some clean clothes and realized that I hadn't eaten since Tuesday morning and here it was Wednesday night. So Wednesday night I got back home and got a little sleep, I think. I don't know everything kind of blends together.

The next day was Thursday and at this point they were in the missing status, I'm pretty sure. I couldn't say exactly when that was declared, but I'm sure that's probably public record now anyway, but so at this point I wasn't bringing any Chaplain out with me, because their Rabbi was out there, and I don't even believe CAPTAIN GREER the ONI rep, came out with me that day at all, or maybe he came out for a short time.

The strange incident that happened on Thursday with regards to the PONTELL family, is we were all kind of sitting there, you know, kind of watching the news, waiting to hear. You know I was communicating to my command with my cell phone and so whenever information or whatever came up they could call me, and you know, and I'd relay it, or I'd get the information if they were looking for information.

At some point in the afternoon though, DARIN's mother [REDACTED] PONTELL, her cell phone started ringing and before she could answer it, it stopped. And she pulled it out anyway, and it

said, "one missed call," and then this call came up as DARIN's cell phone. Her son's cell phone, where it looked like DARIN had just tried to call her. She showed that to me, and you know, I took that as like maybe he was trying to call, maybe he's somewhere in the Pentagon wreckage trapped, and you know has been trying to call and just now was able to get through and you know, for whatever reason he couldn't; the phone disconnected before, you know, we could get to it.

So I called CAPTAIN GREER to let him know about what was going on and that we got this cell phone call and you know so he took it and passed it on to the people at the scene. [REDACTED] wanted to find out where DARIN's car was parked because sometimes he left his stuff in the car, like his cell phone. Sometimes he took it in with him, and she was concerned that, you know, she wanted to rule out the possibility that it was in his car, and that somebody had, you know broken into it or whatever and then used the cell phone, or any kind of scenario just to kind of rule out everything, because she, you know, didn't want to get overly hopeful with this phone call deal. I went outside to make a phone call to Sprint. That was the cell phone search provided DARIN had on his phone, Sprint PCS, and probably for the next two hours kind of got bounced around from person to person just trying to get an answer if they could tell me definitively if somebody had just tried to make a phone call or if this was like some call that was lost in the system and now got through, because you know, I think every one of us were having cell phone problems at one point or another.

Ultimately all they could tell me was that you know, the way their record keeping works that if a call does not get collected where they start billing, they really don't keep a record of it, you know, it's, you know it's just, the network doesn't track that. It only tracks calls that are connected for billing purposes.

But what they did tell me was that if the phone rang, it meant that a call was being attempted and that it wasn't lost in the system. Now that could have just been you know, them trying to pass on like some good publicity that you know, "our calls go right through." I don't know. I just spent three hours on the phone with them and nobody could tell me definitely if you know, somebody was using that cell phone at the time that call was made.

CAPTAIN GREER for his part came back and told us that you know they were looking at the—investigators at the site were looking into it, and also did tell me that if there's any good news to be had, it's going to come sooner than later. You know that the longer, at this point, that we wait, you know, probably the less likely that we are to having good news out of this.

So I sat there with them and an hour stretched by and I would contact command purely to see what was going on, and if anybody had heard anything with this cell phone business. We weren't getting any answers. CAPTAIN GREER had made an attempt to locate DARIN's car based on where [REDACTED] had described it to be parked. Apparently DARIN parked in a peculiar point at the Pentagon that was convenient to him and the weird hours he worked there on the watch floor. And he came back and said that, you know, some people from the ONI had gone out there to look and could not locate his car, but that some of the cars may have been moved for the rescue vehicles and everything like that, and you know, they weren't sure. So close to midnight, you know we still hadn't heard anything about the cell phone or the car except for what CAPTAIN GREER told us, and [REDACTED] father [REDACTED] he wanted to go and look for the car himself. And you know I was like, "Well, you know, the Navy's already looked for it. You know, you're just going to be kind of going out there and getting in the way if you start driving around the parking lot," but he was insistent on it, so more to kind of placate his desires, I said, "OK, let's go." We drove out there and within a minute of going to where [REDACTED] told

the car would be, we found the car. We looked inside there and couldn't find the cell phone. So you know, I called [REDACTED] to tell her that and she was very upset that, you know, it was midnight and you know, we just now determined that the car was there. Well, her father was driving it back at this point, and that the cell phone was not in the car, and that working through our Navy channels that, you know, they hadn't found the car, and no answer had come back on the cell phone issue yet.

So I had, I called the regional duty officer, you know, the same job I was doing over the weekend. You know I called the guy who's doing it now and his senior chief, a guy that you know I worked with before, he was a real professional, SENIOR CHIEF ROBERT CALCANTI (phonetic) and you know kind of explained the situation to him, and you know, he took the ball and ran it, and got a hold of the FBI down at the scene and passed on the information about the cell phone and [REDACTED] for her part, her family called you know like the FBI number in the phone book, because they knew the FBI was running the investigation. And talked to whoever answered the phone about what was going on, but you, you know within 45 minutes, because it seemed CHIEF CALCANTI (phonetic) called down there, we had agents from the scene calling [REDACTED] to talk about the cell phone, you know. To get the cell phone number and go "who was using this?" and stuff like that. And they start running it themselves and they told us that they had picked up some anomalies down at the scene with some people's cell phones, you know, ones they had there, and you know so they were looking into it.

That was Thursday, you know, going into Friday morning at this point, and you know, I was talking to people on the phone, you know all night. We're probably about six o'clock in the morning, you know. Everybody else had, you know, gone to sleep and I was still there, you know, trying to do my part to get any information I could about this cell phone issue.

Ultimately, we never got a good response. No real explanation and you know today, you know still no reason why that phone call came through. And the whereabouts of his cell phone are still unknown.

So I was there pretty much all night and left you know Friday morning after a while. You know basically I needed to go clean up and everything and at this point probably for the next several days, at least until, at least until we identified DARIN's remains I pretty much slept just a couple of hours each night in my office at work. I had gotten a bar of soap from [REDACTED] PONTELL before leaving, so I could use it at the showers at my base, and had stopped by someplace to pick up some other items I'd need, you know, to kind of stay clean and not stink. Started just, you know, I'd shower in the little shower facilities in the building I worked at, and would sleep in my chair at night just because at this point on, I actually spent a lot of time with the PONTELL's anticipating that we were going to get some good news or bad news real soon, and I wanted to be there to deliver it as soon as possible So I was there with them for most of the day and I'd leave real late at night and my thought process was well I'd rather get four hours of sleep in my chair then driving an hour back to Annapolis and getting up and driving an hour back into work. So you know, I kind of just slept in my office, when I slept.

So at this point it kind of became a waiting game. And I tried to, you know I was telling my Naval Academy stories and everything because I knew DARIN went there and they were used to hearing Naval Academy stories and this seemed to kind of take their mind off things hearing about the crazy antics midshipman would get themselves into, and we, you know, this kind of routine kind of fell in where every time the phone would ring everybody would jump, you know, including me. You know, I was collecting information from them for my command, you know, because they're anticipating casualties too.

On the 17<sup>th</sup>, and I want to say that was –

Q. (40:12) Monday?

A. Was that Monday? It was Monday or Wednesday.

Q. It was two days later.

A. Ok, yes, so it would have been Monday, Monday night, when I was leaving there I just kind of, I remember having like a really bad feeling about things. It was the first time I had kind of really given up hope myself. So I started just thinking about how exactly I was going to tell them if, in fact I was told that you know DARIN had been identified. All the remains were being taken out to Dover for identification there and they were using DNA analysis, fingerprint analysis, dental records. DARIN being in the military, you know we had his DNA. So we were just waiting to hear. While we were hoping to hear some good news that maybe he was in the hospital and had been unconscious, who knows. But that Monday night I started getting a real sinking feeling in my gut, and so I'm kind of trying to figure out what I was going to say to them.

I had, at some point during the weekend, during some free moment I had actually gone to a bookstore and picked up a book on, on Judaism. The Jewish culture and everything, because I'm a Catholic, and I know nothing about, you know, their unique culture. I most certainly didn't want in this stressful time to kind of do anything wrong. So I had picked up a book on it and was reading about you know anything applicable towards, you know, the situation.

They have some very significant rules that they abide to when there's a death. Such as they don't want the body to have an autopsy. They insist that, you know, the body is buried in the ground as quickly as possible, you know. I'm talking like within a day or two after, after the death occurs,

and the coffin can't have any metal in it, the body can't have any metal in it, things like this. So I had kind of already started like getting together in my mind, you know, the questions and stuff that I was going to have to take if this was, if DARIN was identified, to try to like stay in line with their culture, while still satisfying the Navy's way of handling these situations.

And now it's Monday night and before I go any further, because I don't want to leave this out, I had found out that DARIN had had an older brother named STEPHAN who was an Academy graduate from 1989 who was an aviator and was—died in flight training and it was during his first carrier landing, you know practice carrier landing, when there was a mishap and STEPHAN got killed. That was back in like 1989 so they'd already, the PONTELL family had already lost one son in the Navy to an accident, and now they're anticipating that they had lost another one and there was one son in between, [REDACTED] PONTELL who, you know wasn't in the military, wasn't in the Navy or anything and I know that had to be rough on him too.

But anyway, so back to Monday night I was kind of anticipating that we're going to get bad news and Tuesday morning—you know now it had been a week—I woke up in my chair and kind of felt, kind of like a nice calm about things. It was kind of odd, like, you know I didn't feel kind of you know, up until this point we're all kind of nervous and apprehensive every time the phone rang, but for some reason I wasn't afraid of the phone this day. I even told the wife this much you know that I had a feeling we were going to get some answers today and that, you know, things are going to be OK, in regards to that you know we would hear something.

At some point in the day, in the early afternoon, probably around 1400 I think, my phone rang and you know I'm sitting in the room with these people and I pick up the phone and there's some enlisted guy calling from our little CACO impromptu headquarters we'd set up in the basement

of Building 200 at the Navy Yard and he told me that DARIN had been identified at Dover through dental records.

You know, so it was like, you know I didn't want to kind of give it away over the phone and was kind of mad that he kind of delivered it like that before I could kind of you know get myself somewhere else. So I said, "OK, thank you very much," and hung up and then went outside to call, because I called him back and I was like, you know, "I just want to make sure I heard you right." And you know he said. "Yes," you know, "they identified him." So I went back into the house and at this particular time [REDACTED] was there and her mother was there and two of her friends were there and ideally you want to deliver the news with a chaplain, but you know after spending a week with these people now, there's no way I could have sat there and not told them while I was waiting for some other people to show up. I didn't think that would be very fair to them. So I, you know, in proper military fashion I put on my cover, and she saw me do that and knew what was coming and I said a little speech I'd rehearsed in case it was going to be a casualty and probably the hardest thing I've ever had to do was, you know, tell this young woman that her husband was dead. They'd only been married for six months, but they'd know each other since they were like twelve.

So I delivered the news and paged her father for her and told him to come back and DARIN's parents were on the way over there, too you know because they were just in the habit of—they would come out in the morning. They'd take off for a couple of hours and come back in the evening and so they were going to be there within half an hour as well.

So when [REDACTED] father got there they told him, and I went outside to wait for DARIN's parents to show up, and when they showed up I gave them the same speech. That we identified DARIN and I stayed with them, you know for probably like half and hour before I was like,



“Well there’s a bunch of things we’ve got to get doing now.” And went back to the base to pick up some paperwork, so I could you know get the ball rolling with like their death gratuity claim, things like that and came back out there, and you know, it was a rough evening and you know every time I tried to leave, they didn’t want me to leave. So you know I wasn’t going to just leave them and so again I stayed out there pretty late and then they, you know, expressed their own concerns about, you know we’ve got to do this quickly, you know. Part of our religion is, you know, we’ve got to bury him quickly. You know Navy can’t do an autopsy and I, you know, of course I had already kind of read up on this so I was calling out there to try to expedite process and, for what it's worth, even though DARIN wasn’t the first one identified, he was the first remains to get shipped back because of the pressure that, you know, I tried to put on Dover. I felt good about that, because –

Q. (48:53) Who did you speak to at Dover, when you called out there. Was it CAPTAIN O’BRIEN, or MASTER CHIEF BOND, or –

A. I talked to an HMC, I’d have to go look at my notes.

Q. (49:06) Yes, one of the morticians though.

A. Yes, and he kind of helped me out and got things rolling and Friday we actually had the funeral and it was the first funeral of any of the September 11<sup>th</sup> people. But in between that time, you know they also were concerned that an autopsy was going to be performed, because it’s SOP for Navy casualties, is you know they do an autopsy, but the way it was explained to me was that the Navy’s definition of autopsy is also the whole process of identification, you know doing the dental record, and you know preparing the remains and things like that so, and that it wasn’t

really un-intrusive kind of operation, you know, that we weren't really trying to determine the cause of death in this manner because it was fairly apparent. So we got everything taken care of for Wednesday and Wednesday night it may have been, Wednesday afternoon or early Thursday, CAPTAIN TOM BREYER who replaced—he was a Reservist that was reactivated. He replaced CAPTAIN GREER as our ONI rep. He did a phenomenal job, you know, kind of coming into it late in the game. He—in fact, his name was CAPTAIN TOM BREYER and his nickname amongst the family and myself was CAPTAIN BREYER Ice Cream, but you know, he drove out to Dover to be the officer escort for the remains coming back.

The remains were delivered to the JOYCE CHORCHINSKY (phonetic) Hebrew funeral home in Silver Springs Maryland. Thursday, you know. I sat there with the family and the Rabbi and we all kind of came up with a funeral plan. You know I was there telling them what the Navy would provide, you know ceremonial support, you know like a rifle squad, taps and things like that and the Rabbi was there to kind of like, you know keep the ceremony, you know within the rules of Judaism and so we kind of struck a nice balance, you know between what their culture demanded and an honorable military service for a fallen comrade.

One thing that the family wanted was DARIN liked his chokers. You know and didn't like his service dress blue uniform as much, apparently, and in fact when DARIN and [REDACTED] had gotten married, he wore chokers and so they wanted him to be buried in chokers and the problem being that the remains were shipped to us and the standard uniform for that is our service dress blues. So Thursday I had, you know, I went out at the family's request and I picked up some new chokers because [REDACTED] didn't want to part with the older ones. You know like down to the shoes and socks and everything and shoulder boards.

Then at this point DARIN was still a Lieutenant Junior Grade, he was posthumously promoted. His name was on the promotion list for Lieutenant, but that wouldn't have gone into effect until May. So I bought LT jg bars, and went out to the funeral home and you know, they put the casket in a little room, and you know, I opened it and changed out the uniforms and you know at this point I know he was a jg. Somebody had forgot to tell us that they were going to promote them, because the SBDs, he was buried with were striped for LT, and so I, you know I only had jg bars there, and didn't know if I'd have time to go get new Lieutenant bars or anything so I just without really thinking, I just said, "Well, I'll just give him mine for now, and I'll pick up some new ones for myself." So I put the Lieutenant bars on and, on the chokers for DARIN and closed everything up and left and went back to my base.

On my way back I remember talking to MASTER CHIEF GINNIS and because she had called me to get some information. She could tell from the way I was talking that you know I was kind of like in a strange mood. So I kind of explained to her what I had just been doing and you know it wasn't the easiest thing in the world to do, and I explained about the shoulder boards and everything and you know didn't think much of it, and then I got back to my base, and I'm wearing jg bars, and I notice everybody's looking at them, but nobody's saying anything. And kind of surprised me because I figured somebody would say, Like "Why are you wearing jg bars," but apparently everybody knew all ready, and so it was just kind of like a real quietness about it. And that kind of stayed with me for a while, you know, because I didn't do that to go and tell people that I did that or anything.

In fact I went to go see CAPTIN CUMMINGS about something, she wanted to see me and she made some reference to me giving up my bars and I was like you know, "How did you hear

about that?" She was like you know, "We have ears here," or something like that. So that was an interesting exchange that I had there with her.

So I went and bought new Lieutenant bars and went back out to see the family and kind of got everything squared away for the next day. So the funeral was going to be Friday and you know we'd made arrangements for ceremonial guardsmen to come out there. You know the flag folding, the DNI, ADMIRAL PORTERFIELD, who you know, the head of Naval Intelligence who DARIN worked for was going to be out there to present the Purple Heart and the flag to [REDACTED] PONTELL.

However, before we got to that point, excuse me, sometime the night before, Thursday night, going back to Thursday night, they expressed concern you know they can't be buried with anything metal, including like wedding rings, things like that. There was a big concern that he might get buried with his wedding band or his Naval Academy ring or something like that, because they wanted those back.

I called up to Dover and was like, "Hey look," you know, "Do you know what was recovered with the remains," and they couldn't really give me a good satisfactory answer to anything at all being found or removed, you know. So I didn't like the fact that I couldn't tell them, you know, he's, there's no, he does not have his rings on, you know, because I couldn't give them that answer. So Friday before the funeral and everything began, I once again went back out to the funeral home with the, JOYCE CHORCHINSKY (phonetic) the funeral home director, and once again opened up the casket and did a search of his hands to make sure that there was no rings or anything and there weren't.

So you know, we closed it up and kind of got on with the funeral and it was, the service was held at their synagogue, SHIER TAFILLA (phonetic) and near Silver Spring Maryland. It was a real

nice service. The whole place was packed, like their whole community came out for it and a whole bunch of military people from DARIN's previous commands came up from Norfolk for it, a lot of people from ONI came out to it.

JOYCE CHORCHINSKY (phonetic) had worked with the Maryland State Police for many years and she arranged a phenomenal police escort to where the interment would be and that was about 45 minutes away from their synagogue up in near Baltimore, where STEPHEN'S buried. With the police escort we were able to fly and there was, I remember at one point driving and looking ahead and seeing nothing but cars in this procession and looking behind me and seeing nothing but cars in this procession.

And it was what I would call a real hero's funeral and we got to the cemetery and they said some words. They lowered the casket, oh they did the flag fold, you know the whole military drill and in their culture one of the things they do which, to me as a Catholic I've never seen one of these, was part of the mourning process, is everybody shovels in the dirt. Starting with you know the widow or whoever. So she scoops some dirt and tosses it down there, and I imagine that had to be so incredibly hard to do, and just the way ██████████ held herself through all this was really amazing. My God, I don't know how she kept herself together, because you know I didn't even know the guy and this is tough on me, and just how she handled herself during all this was just amazing.

So everybody kind of you know kind of worked down the line, and as we got near the end, you know, people kind of got a little tired, less than enthusiastic about doing it I guess, and like DARIN's two best friends you know are just like the only guys doing. So you know I was in my whites, so I jumped in there too and helped them finish the job, you know, for my shipmate there.

Then you know everybody kind of started breaking away. I had a—████████ PONTCELL, DARIN's father had requested, all the shell casings if he could from the rounds that the guy would fire. So after they had you know done the shots and played tap, you know, I had to talk to the officer in charge of the whole squad there and asked if I could get those and he said no problem, but during the funeral I couldn't find those guys at all and I didn't want to come back empty handed so I actually called out and was able to get a hold of—where the ceremonial guard was out of was Fort Mead, and was able to get a hold of some of the guardsmen on watch there, and said, "Hey, when they get in here you know have them hold them," because I saw them collecting, and he gave me a call a little later and said that he pulled them out for me, and so I was able to go pick them up and bring them out to the PONTCELL's residence, DARIN's parent's residence where they were having a wake.

In the Jewish culture it's called Chiva (phonetic) and it's where they mourn and it's like a seven day-long process, or maybe it's ten days. I don't know, I'm a little fuzzy on that now, where they every night they do like a little service. So I felt good that I was able to bring those there to them. So I went out paid my respects for their Chiva every night that they held it, and at the end of that you know I prepared all the paperwork and everything for ██████████ beforehand, you know, as much as I could. Everything but the signatures basically so that you know for everything that she was entitled to from the military, you know. I can just explain it to her and help her sign it. She wouldn't have to fill anything out. And so a couple of days after the Chiva and this is you know probably two weeks after the burial at this point, you know, we sat down and went through the paperwork, and you know took care of all that and filed it and sent it in for her.

And I also compiled a list of all the different charities and organization that were popping up to help out survivors and you know widowed people. I'd called around to those people and explained who I was and that I was working for ██████████ PONTELL in this capacity.

Just kind of got the, you know as much paperwork, kind of the ball rolling with these people as I could, just so that when she called she wouldn't have to explain as much and gave her a nice kind of chart, of you know, people that were going to call her back and people who, you know, the different organizations that maybe didn't have anything that they could provide to her because they were set up for like the children of the survivors, things like that. You know just trying to do my part there to kind of make you know, it a little easier for her to find some more assistance as she needs it.

We, you know, I spent a lot of time hanging out with the families and stuff and you know kind of got close to them and have a nice bond there and being as I kind of continue to check in with them. As far as like my CACO duties go, you know they're pretty much at this point all wrapped up. There's just one or two little things, we're still running down. For instance, we're still looking for that ring, wedding ring and academy ring. Apparently all the personal effects, you know were collected as evidence and whatnot, by the FBI and they were turned over to a group at Fort Meyers to process and what they are doing apparently is preparing a catalogue of all these non-attributable items, things that don't have people's names in them or whatever that can be easily describe to somebody. And they are printing a catalogue for the families to look at and make claims against.

So you know, I'm still kind of keeping tabs on that. In fact I just found out today it's been delayed again 'til probably March, which is unfortunate, because I know these families have been waiting a long time.

You know I gave them a hand with their shadow box, you know. She wanted something to make a nice tribute to DARIN with a shadow box so I gave her a hand with that and every now and then little things come up.

In my official capacity though, and you know of course we had, oh and I had a memorial service on the October 11<sup>th</sup>, you know, one month out where they honored “the magnificent seven” as they called them, the seven that died from the CNO IP, and so me and CAPTAIN TOM BREYER, we went out there with the families for that and then on the 13<sup>th</sup> of October of course was the big Pentagon one. That was quite a circus as far as like what all went into it. All the planning and staging and for the short turnaround on that I thought they did a magnificent job, and all us CACOs you know, we helped coordinate. You know, they provided a hotel room and things for the families down there in Crystal City so they wouldn’t have to get up early to come out there and worked out bus arrangements and everything and we were you know we escorted them in and things like that. That was a really nice tribute that they did.

As far as, you know, I’m sure I’m forgetting little things here and there. Everything become, for about a month there everything was kind of blurred together where I was either sleeping in my office or near the end there I started finally being able to get out to my house, but that whole first month just went so quick and it was after the Pentagon memorial that we actually started doing the paperwork for all the benefits and everything.

I don’t know what happened to the rest of fall, you know it just all kind of got mashed together, I didn’t see it.

I still talk to ██████████ and the families a lot. In fact ██████████ and I have kind of become friends, which probably isn’t professional on my part, but you know after going through something like that it’s kind of hard not to, you know develop a friendship with somebody you



go through something like that with. So we talk a lot, you know, and you know, I kind of, I can't imaging what she's going through. But it's, you know, I'm like a—someone she can kind of vent to, when she's having problems that's not family. Unlike her other friends, you know, I know a lot about you know like the monetary situation that she's in now from like Navy benefit's and others and you know she doesn't have to explain much to me so she kind of feels a little bit more comfortable that way, you know, that she can just kind of like vent to me about things that are going on and the problems she's feeling and her concerns about everything.

I don't know I suppose that's probably about all the major things from my CACO duties that kind of jump out at me.

Q. (01:08:12) What kind of interaction did you have with the family is it Advocacy Center at Crystal City?

Q. (another) Assistance Center.

Q. Assistance Center.

A. That was, I thought that in theory I thought that was a great idea. In reality, I don't know how other people grieve, but I like to grieve in private and that was a very public place and that was the only concern I had about it. Apparently, [REDACTED] and her family kind of felt the same way because despite numerous attempts on my part to get them to go out there, they chose not to, except for [REDACTED] father. He went out probably twice for two different briefings that were out there, before DARIN was identified as a casualty to kind of, where they were kind of giving like situational reports.

Q. (01:09:03) The General.

A. Yes, exactly, Now on the other hand I did go out there a lot to pick up forms and everything, because there was a nice clearing house for me where I could go to right—the Red Cross or USAA, you know or any of these other groups that are out there and say, “Hey, I’m LT Delaroderie. I’m the Casualty Assistant Calls Officer for DARIN PONTELL’s family. I want to fill in as much paperwork as I can with you guys and then take it back and get signatures from the wife, because you know, she’s just not comfortable coming out here right now.” So that I know saved her some time and effort on her part and made a lot of things convenient for me so I didn’t have to go and track down some outside organizations. I don’t think I said, they’re all in the same room, but I know that she didn’t just, she didn’t feel comfortable going there because she didn’t want to see the other families and everything at that point. She thought it would be too hard.

Q. (01:10:03) Did you need to go there for the briefings that they were giving? Is that how you needed to get information or were you able to get that information in other ways?

A. Well, I went out there a few times for, we had two or three mandatory briefings out there for all the CACOs especially as we got close to the Pentagon tribute, memorial service that they had. But for the most part, we at the Navy Yard with out little impromptu set up CACO headquarters, had all the information getting channeled through there. Anything needed, BUPERS or whoever needed, it went to that office and that office called out to us, or if we needed anything we could call that office and they’d run it down for us.

I’d done CACO cases before, in fact I’d done three of them before, where you have to do everything yourself, and so having these people there to support me was just wonderful. Made my job so much easier. And I remember after the fact some of these other people that had been

drafted to do CACO work, they'd never done it before and they were actually complaining like "Yeah," you know, "We kept getting calls for the same information." You know, "We'd give it to one person and then the next person on watch would call for the same thing." And I'm just, and you know they were complaining about that and I was like, "You guys don't know how easy it was, because you know typically you don't have somebody calling you for the information you're going to have to call out there to get everything done yourself." So I liked how we did it at the Navy Yard, taking care of our Navy people because it was you know, really quick channel communication that I had, and they were working right with Millington. You know, it kind of wasn't getting, it wasn't getting lost. Kind of going off the chain somewhere. And so I don't know about the Joint Causality Assistant Center like how other people felt about that. Working through those channels, but I don't know the process that would be successful because Army does it different then the Navy does it, with you know processing things. But as far as having a lot of those resources available to the families that chose to go there, I thought was really good. And I know that the people that went out there probably really appreciated everything that was there, especially that they could—the impromptu memorial that was kind of set up where people were leaving pictures and everything of their loved ones, you know that's kind of touching to me. So, yes, I spent some time out there. I found it useful for the regards of having everybody kind of close together where I can just do one stop shopping and get all these forms, or to file these forms, but the family I was working with they just didn't really want to go out there and kind of be in public to do their grieving. They wanted to keep it private. So I didn't push it.

Q. (01:12:56) Have they ever been to see the Pentagon?

A. Well they went to the service, and –

Q. (01:13:01) Other than the October 11<sup>th</sup> service.

A. I know [REDACTED], the father has, and driving some place with [REDACTED] to do paperwork or something we actually drove, you know, the long way around it so she could kind of see it and to my knowledge that's the only time she has seen it. The only thing I've got to say as a CACO officer with regard to this whole terrorist attack thought is, and granted I'm probably biased because I'm in the military, but I am, as a military officer I am more upset with a symbol of our defense, the symbol of our headquarters of freedom, the Pentagon where all of our decisions for the military groups come from, I'm more upset that that was attacked and that was hit and people died there, then I could ever be with the terrorist attacks to the civilian targets, and I'm not trying to belittle the loss of the World Trade Centers or the loss of life there, but I can't help but feel that for a large part unless you live in DC or if you're in the military, the media has kind of glossed over the Pentagon, and that has really upset me. And also just about every other person I've talked to in this area, you know that DC's kind of been looked over, because, "Oh, the military." Just because we're in the military, you know it's OK for us to get attacked and I find that more objectionable than just about anything.

Like if the Statue of Liberty had been hit, I think that would have been on the same kind of level, as much of a shock to our country because the Statue of liberty again is one of our symbols of our freedom and our posterity. I just can't believe that, you know, the center of our defense, our military was hit and its kind of second fiddle, you know to every thing else. It just staggers my imagination that, no way in America, it's like you know what, that's where everything in our military comes from. You know all our commands and decisions and everything come from and that seems kind of like, kind of lost, and granted, you know, seeing the World Trade Centers

come down on TV was a lot more of a visual impact on most people, including myself, but I really feel like you know, the Pentagon has kind of been, as far as the media goes, kind of like glossed over and I don't know maybe they asked for people to, you know, in the media to kind of like not give it a lot of focus, because, you know maybe you know the Pentagon officials didn't want America to go "Oh, my gosh, you know, the symbol of our defense was hit." You know. Just a little soap boxing on my part here.

Q. (01:15:55) Thank you, We thank you. How about any lessons learned, this is the third or -

A. Fourth

Q. Fourth time you've been a CACO. Any lessons learned from all of this?

A. Everyone's been significantly different and everyone has changed me in immeasurable ways and every time I've done one it's always been like I'm never going to look at life the same again, and then I end up looking at life different, you know, after the next one too. Every time you're in a situation like this I think it's got to change you. This was unique in the fact that we went so long where the decision, "whereabouts unknown" or "missing" before they were deceased. So usually when you get an assignment you already know what happened. You know the person's dead and you knock on the door and you tell the families that, and you know, get to work, But with this one it was such a waiting game, and you spend so much time sitting with these families and hoping with these families and every time the phone rings, you know, everybody's jumping that it's kind of hard not to start to care about the lost individual as a person and not just as, you know, a name on a piece of paper that you're assigned to, to do these kind of duties for.

I've got to feel bad for all the majority of the CACO officers who had never done this before. I don't think it's ever easy but at least I've kind of had some experience and kind of know what I

was going to be expecting. A lot of these people just jumped into it, and this was their first time and you know this I know had to be doubly difficult because if I had problems with it, and I've had experience before, then I can imagine what an emotional toll it was on some of these other officers and chiefs doing this job.

More than anything else, I guess, you leave this kind of situation, kind of feeling like you know, you need to take advantage of life while you have it, cause you never know when your times going to be.

And the only kind of real problems I had during the case, during the whole course of the assignment was one of the biggest problems was when the call came through that they had identified DARIN as being deceased, you know I kind of wished whoever's on the other side of that line had said, "Hey," you know, "You with the family right now, because if you are I need you to step away for a second?" Just because, you know I try to like not let an expression cross my face, but I'm sure that one probably did, you know. So I kind of wish we'd done that differently.

For the most part I really liked especially the little CACO center headquarters that we had set up down in the basement of building 200. In fact, you know I had explained to the PONTELLS, you know, [REDACTED] and her parents and DARIN's parents, you know, about it and what they were doing there and they actually gave me extra food that people had brought by for Chiva, you know, for the mourning and they gave it to me to take to all the people standing that watch to kind of like say, "Hey, we appreciate what you're doing." I thought that was very nice.

I, you know, I like the one shop shopping JFAC provided. I'm hoping we won't ever have to do something like that again, but since my family didn't really choose to explore that option, you

know, all I saw was you know the availability of, you know, that one stop shopping aspect and don't know how everything else went.

The family I worked with they never really took advantage of any of the counseling or anything that was available. The large –

Q. (01:20:11) But they knew it was there.

A. They knew it was there. And like I said, the father went out there a couple of times for those briefs with the general, but for the most part, you know, they wanted to be very private about things and they have such a strong community spirit with their synagogue anyway, that I felt that they found everything they needed there with their Rabbi who was out there a lot, or their numerous friends and family that came out. So that was unique for me to see. I was very thankful that they had that strong sense of community within their synagogue for that kind of support that they needed.

Q, (01:20:58) How did the, did you have, number one, dealings with the media, because I know there had been some articles I believe in some of the local papers about them particularly having lost two sons, were you involved or sort of on the sideline on that.

A. Well, I acquainted [REDACTED] that these people were going to be approaching her you know for interviews while he was missing and as soon as he became deceased, you know, because this was such a big thing going on. That you know, she may want to prepare a statement if she doesn't want to talk to them or select somebody in her family to talk to them or we can get a general military issued statement, but she chose to, every change she got, she was proud of DARIN and she wanted to talk about DARIN. They did run into some problems with DARIN's

grandfather, named [REDACTED] he got interviewed probably first and mixed up the grandkids, so a lot of the things he told the paper about DARIN weren't about DARIN at all, and that became the most widely circulated one and I know that upset her. In fact, the Pentagon had set up, had made little placards with like the picture and like a biography of the person and for the biography of DARIN initially it was this article Lou had been interviewed for, where it wasn't even talking about the right kid, and we were able to kind of stop that before the memorial service, to kind of get that changed. But I know a couple of different papers kind of published wrong information and I know that kind of upset her. And I know that I'm also, I also worked as the secondary CACO in the capacity of like the CACO for the family, DARIN's parents, you know.

[REDACTED] my primary duties, but my secondary duties were to [REDACTED] PONTELL, DARIN's parents and I know that they got you know, when Stephen passed away they were the primary next of kin, so everything that came, came to them. So I know that they had a little bit of a hard time accepting that [REDACTED] was the primary next of kin and that everything was coming to her and all the attention was on her. I know that that was difficult for them and they expressed it to me on numerous occasions, that you know like they weren't getting any of these letters, you know from the President, or any number of people and you know all I could explain to them was that well—the Navy, you know, our people, our CNO and everybody they did send out letters to both the primary next of kin and the parents, you know, if they weren't one in the same, and you know, so the Navy did a great job of covering you know both sides of the house there to make sure that the parents weren't left out—and but everybody else that were receiving letters or flags or what have you, they were doing that on their own, judging on their own free will.



It's kind of difficult, I was in a kind of a difficult position of trying to explain to them that you know, she gets a letter from like her Congressman, you know or the President or you know Rumsfeld or whoever, you know that was not, it's nothing that the Navy has any control over. That's those people saying, "Hey," you know "Who's the primary next of kin here?" And, "We want to send them our sympathy," you know and so that was, you know, eventually they kind of start to accept that but I know that that was kind of hard on them, especially because when Stephen passed away they made a huge memorial to him in their basement with like pictures and his Academy sword and diploma and everything and all these letters they got, and for DARIN they don't have that, you know, All that stuff, diplomas and everything, you know those are [REDACTED] now and all the letters and everything are coming into [REDACTED] and I'm not sure, you know, if she's going to give them stuff you know to let them you know make their memorial or if she wants to hold on to it to make a memorial for her husband herself, but you know, some of the family politics, I really don't want to be involved in.

(laugh)

But I know, you know, as parents that's got to be rough for them. You know [REDACTED] and DARIN were only married six months and while that's kind of a short period of time, DARIN chose to marry her, and that's what I tried to explain to them you know that DARIN chose to start a live with [REDACTED] and you know, they got married, and all the Navy paperwork he has listed her as the primary next of kin you know, for everything. And you know it's really nothing we can do about it and you know I hope they can kind of set aside, you know any kind of differences they may have about this you know to kind of honor DARIN instead of kind of getting upset. Because I know some other families, you know just through the rumor mill, of us CACOs, like I heard of one family, there's like a court action going to decide what's going to be

put on the grave stone, and that's silly at a time like this that families aren't coming together, but their using this to kind, of you, know pull apart, and so I'm thankful at the very least then that they haven't had any of those problems, you know. That [REDACTED] and her in-laws and all they're you know, they're still cooperative and friendly and talking and all as it should be. But I know that it's got to be worse for the parents not to be getting that stuff this time because you know they have lost two sons, and you know, personally I kind of wish that our government would recognize their significant loss. I mean they've lost two sons to service in the Navy now, and it's bad enough losing one, now two, and I mean that's you know, that's quite a loss for anybody. So, but yes, I know there's kind of that issue going on and that's going to be rough for them. You know, that [REDACTED] getting everything now and they're not, but on the other hand they know the Navy's taking you know a lot of steps to help them out. And the Navy has sent them letters and the Navy has provided them you know a burial flag too, and you know a survivor pin just like the wife got and that was a big deal to DARIN's mother to get one of those survivor pins. So I'm, I can only feel good that you know as the Navy representative to the PONTELLs, you know we did, we did as good a job as you know we could under these circumstances for them and that they feel that at least the Navy has taken care of them.

Q. (01:28:23) The newspaper article in the *WASHINGTON POST* a couple of weeks ago, the Sunday paper, the "Last Watch," I forget the title of it, about the CNO IP, any reaction because it was quite a touching article.

A. I did not like it because couple reasons. I kind of felt like you know, I'm biased, you know I'm looking out for DARIN here and I didn't like how everybody else kind of like had pictures of them, and there's a picture of DARIN in there when he was twelve years old and I thought

that was kind of odd that DARIN's parents chose to have a picture of them holding a family picture. I can kind of see where they were coming from because they had STEPHEN there and also DARIN, but you know, I'd want DARIN to be remembered as who he was when he died, which was a Lieutenant in the United States Navy, you know, 26 year old young man. Not a twelve year old kid looking over his infant brother's shoulders, and I know that [REDACTED] has some concerns with that and the rest of the article as far as the parents kind of passing on some bad information. Not quite getting the story straight, but you know, so I, you know kind of have some mixed feelings about it, but for the most part you know as far as everything else goes, kind of bringing some light onto what the CNO IP did and their schedules and I heard through [REDACTED] about, you know, all of them going out, you know to these bars and everything like it was reported in the article. So that was good to see. You know I'm glad that people could see that kind of side to these you know intelligence officers and civilian analysts that were working there then. You know they had a fun side to, and you know there weren't, you know that they would go out and have fun and everything, because that's I think how you'd want to be remember as you know, fun loving and you know happy and not just, you know, before that who knew what these people really did?

I tend to side with [REDACTED] on a lot of these articles, because she has concerns that the article, just about every article has focused on the parents because they've lost two sons now instead of focusing on DARIN dying. You know it's become more of the PONTELLs having lost two, two Navy officers in their family, and [REDACTED] lost is losing her husband, and you know, my personal thought is, yes, you want to focus on DARIN, you know, STEPHEN had the attention years ago, and you know so, that's just my opinion. Maybe I'm wrong for it, but you know I think that the, they need to focus on, on [REDACTED] loss, you know the fact the DARIN's gone,

and not the fact that two sons now, you know a decade apart have died. You know that's important but I kind of feel like that's pushed everything instead of letting the attention fall on [REDACTED] and her loss, the family keeps trying to turn back to "Oh, we've lost two children, now." I know that's got to be rough and everything, but I just kind of feel like [REDACTED] loss has been ignored, and as a CACO primarily to her, I feel that's where my obligation is, is to [REDACTED] and seeing it from her side, yes, it does kind of, yes I can see where she's coming from when she complains that that's the case, that the loss, the attention has been put on the parent's loss and not her loss.

Because if I was married and I lost my wife, I'd want my wife to be remember as an individual and not as the sister of the somebody else that passed away. But again I'm jumping off on a soapbox here

Q, (01:32:44) That's fine, no thank you. Do you have anything else that you wanted to add for the historical record that we haven't asked out about?

A. I, you know I'll probably walk out of here and think of a million things that I want to say, but

Q. (01:32:58) Come on back for another, (chuckle) is there anybody you would recommend that we should talk to that could really show the side of the CACO officer?

A. I can tell you some interesting people to talk to perhaps would be CHIEF ANGELO JONES. He's a legalman in the Navy, well a chief and he worked with a civilian, not a military you know, like we assigned our CACOs to even the families of the civilians that died.

Q. (01:33:36) DOD, civilians and the airlines?

A. No, just the, I think the air, well I know for the memorial tribute yes we had –

Q. (01:33:43) Courtesy –

A. Yes, but he was working the civilian, [REDACTED] and I know he's had all sort of trouble because as far as the Navy goes, [REDACTED] is not really entitled to a whole lot. And so he's being trying to kind of waiting, like you know, how can I help her and show her that she's not being left out when there's nothing I can really do for her. So he's gone through incalculable kind of hardships that you know I didn't have to face, because you know, he had a civilian, and –

Q. (01:34:17) This is for [REDACTED]

A. Yes, [REDACTED] the survivor.

Q, OK.

A. And you know I even hear from, through [REDACTED] who's talked to [REDACTED] like some of her problems and everything, and I'm just mad you know. I'm lucky that, you know, I had a Navy guy because we have all the structure set up to support these people and I couldn't imagine being a civilian going through all this. So that would be an interesting one to talk to. Just probably a very different take on things, you know the problems and everything he had because I know it's been kind of rough on him, too. Yes, so he'd be a good one and I guess eventually you guys will talk to the families? The widows and all that or no?

Q. (01:35:05) When, if they're ready to talk. When we're still in the process of doing that.

Q (another) We're real sensitive not to be –

A. Because I mentioned to [REDACTED] I was going to do this and I know she'd be interested in talking to you guys. That –

Q. Really?

Q. (another) Really, great.

Q. So we would contact you to do that?

A. Yes, well you probably could contact her directly. I've already told her that I was going to talk to you guys and that –

Q. (01:35:27) OK.

A. And I mentioned that eventually you guys were going to try and go out to the families and talk to them. I said, "So would you want to talk to them?" She said, you know again, she's very proud of DARIN and stuff, that every chance to talk –

Q. That would be wonderful.

Q. (another) That would be really wonderful.

A. And that way she can bring her own perspective to what I've told you too, and yes, so she would, I can even give you like her home phone number if you'd like it.

Q. That would be great.

A. You want it right now?

In July or August I had actually sent in my request, you know to be released from active duty from the Navy and after the 11<sup>th</sup> you know I think a lot of us, a lot of people in my position that were you know, planning on getting out started to re-evaluate things, and by October I had, put up a request through my command to be sent out to have my release from active duty withdrawn and so it's been withdrawn and I'll be staying in the Navy a little bit longer to, you know,

because I feel like, now more than ever there, s a job to be done and I want to be part of it. You know I couldn't walk away from it now.

That's it. Something cool like that.

Q. Thanks very much for you time and for everything that you did.

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Ethel Geary  
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