

**Naval Historical Center
Oral Interview Summary Form**

Interviewers:

CAPT Gary Hall
CDR Mike McDaniel
Dr. Gary Weir

Interviewer's Organization:

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

Interviewee:

Powell, Ronald HM1

Current Address:

N1

Date of Interview:

09 OCT 2001

Place of Interview:

Navy Annex

Number of Cassettes:

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Name of Project:

Pentagon Terrorist Attack Incident

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Pentagon; Terrorist Attack; September 11, 2001; triage; first aid; evacuation; lessons learned; Defense Protective Service; FBI; carnage; Navy Command Center; renovation, SPRINT.

Abstract of Interview:

1. HM1 Powell was born in the [REDACTED] in 1960. He has four brothers and one sister. He was the only child to go into the military. He believes that his father was in the military, possibly the Korean War, but has no record. He has four sons. The older son, 21, is an Army recruiter. Petty Officer Powell joined the military at age 23 after working for UPS. He entered the Navy in 1983 under the TAR program. After boot camp he went to the Allentown, PA Reserve Center. Later, he served at NAF in Washington, DC. He went back to Great Lakes, IL, then to two more Reserve Centers, and finally to the Navy Annex in Washington DC. This was HM1's first staff billet. He works for Master Chief Pruce, under Capt Send, who is the Enlisted Community Manager, under N132 - ADM Henry.

2. On September 11th his office was preparing to lead focus groups on a brief given to the Chief of Naval Personnel. They were setting up the classrooms for the group meetings in the Annex. At about 0845 they were welcoming people into the focus groups. At 0915 the fire alarm went off. They heard a faint explosion. A Captain said to "sit tight" and went to see what was going on. HM1 said that the fire alarm goes off frequently and they didn't know whether or not to take it seriously. The Captain returned and said, "everybody out now!" They went to the front of the building to the parking lot. They could see a cloud of smoke coming from the Pentagon and a friend said that a plane had hit it. HM1 Powell slowly walked toward the Pentagon. He was unaware what had happened at the World Trade Center at the time. He was called back to muster. At that time they found out about the World Trade Center. A van pulled up and someone inside said that all medical and dental personnel needed to muster at Henderson Hall immediately, for triage. They first went back into the Navy Annex to get medical supplies.

They got everything into a cart, put it into the van and headed to Henderson Hall. They got to the gym area at 1000. The group set up a triage with about 4 or 5 corpsman, 3 doctors, 8 or 9 nurses, and 10 dental personnel, and then waited on casualties from the blast. At 1130 they received the first burn victim. The person was “in bad shape” and had second-degree burns. They started two IVs in order to get him stabilized and then decided to send him to the hospital. Three or four walk-ins came later. One muscle shock victim was also seen and sent to the hospital. Two others patients needed oxygen. He stayed until 1830. Petty Officer Powell lives on Bolling AFB. He said that he was emotionally disturbed and that when pulled into his driveway he could not grasp what had happened. Earlier that day, he did not have his wife’s phone number. The number was left inside the Navy Annex stored on his cellular phone. He called the answering machine between 1600 and 1700 to let them know that he was all right. He said that he goes over to the Pentagon frequently to visit friends and that his wife would be worried. He left a message explaining the triage and that he was OK. He said that he couldn’t get out of the van in his driveway for thirty minutes. He was in tears. He and his wife talked about what had happened in New York. They had been there two months ago.

3. He has never experienced a mass casualty situation before in his career. His training was effective to help deal with what had happened. Some people were stressed out. The driver of the van on the way to Henderson Hall was driving fast, and he told the HM3 driver to slow down and keep calm. He said that he had a job to do and had to keep focused. He was “calm and cool.” He feels that his training had prepared him for the events that took place. It was the basic hospital training he believes. They did not see a lot of patients at the triage. The doctors helped and saw all of the patients. He runs his own department so that helped also. He said that nothing could have prepared him for the next day.

4. The 12th of September was very different from the previous day for Petty Officer Powell. He didn’t sleep the night before and was tired. He was up in his office checking his email, as CAPT Send was telling him about an HM2 that was at the crash site. HM1 said that this was not correct, and that the HM2 was with him all day. It didn’t sound right so HM1 Powell and LCDR Nordholn went to the Pentagon to check out the situation. HM2 was supposed to have been giving information back to the Command Center about what was happening at the crash sight. The Command Center was looking for information about the bodies coming out of the Pentagon. HM1 Powell and LCDR Nordholn were at a tent in the parking lot when they were told that the crew needed people to go into the crash site to get bodies for the FBI to look at. They were given suits and gloves. He stated that it hadn’t “sunk in” what he would actually be doing. At 0830 or 0900 they went into the building to where the plain had hit. An Army E-9 was in charge of this recovery operation. He led them in. The building was “tore all to hell.” He also described it as “horrific.” The members of the crew opened up a body bag and put something in it. HM1 Powell didn’t see the contents because he was too far back. The crew zipped up the bag and carried it out. On the second trip into the building HM1 and the LCDR bagged a torso. No arms or legs. It was the torso of a large male. They put the torso into a bag, carried it out and put an identification tag on it. The LCDR and HM1 were the only Navy Personnel in this crew at this time; the rest were Army. HM1 Powell said that people were vomiting during the recovery efforts. At 1200 they took a lunch break, and HM1 got something to eat. Around this time Chief Hamilton came to the site to join the Navy men in their efforts. At 1300 they suited back up and went in to a different area. This time they went into the actual impact spot. The building was unsafe. “Don ‘t leave your Shipmates. Stay together,” HM1 said they were told by the E-9. They came across a badly burned female body that was in a crouching position – just a torso, a head, and an arm. The other parts of the body were badly burned. They were trying to figure out

which pieces to put into the bag. There were several pieces around. That was the strongest memory that HM1 Powell recalled. He was very angry. He said that she looked defenseless and was trying to take cover. The crew carried out 40 bags total – 8 by the Navy team, which was also joined at some point by Senior Chief Green. It was a very long day, and he secured at 2100. He went back up to the Annex and briefed the Captain on what had happened. Having ID cards on them identified two bodies, but no real identifications could be made until Dover performed the DNA work. He then went home and stayed in the van in the driveway for about 1 hour. He didn't sleep that night either.

5. As for lessons learned, HM1 Powell feels that the Navy needs to do more casualty drilling. They need to include different scenarios. "This opened up our eyes," he said. He also feels that we are not able to put in a stress factor because this type of situation affects everyone differently. No drill can prepare for the actual situation. People will react differently in a real casualty.

6. He stated that the LCDR and he were at the scene the second day in order to get information for the CNP. The crew needed people to do search and rescue operations and they happened to be there. The LCDR said that he was Navy and that there were Navy people in the building; that they were going to get those people out. HM1 said that he was simply following orders. In order to cope with what had happened, Petty Officer Powell said that he has spoken with the Chaplain and with SPRINT teams. He feels that there is nothing that could have been done to actually prepare him for what happened. He said that you couldn't prepare mentally or physically. He said that we can drill, set up people with fake blood, but nothing compares with the real thing.

7. HM1 Powell stated that a person should feel honored to enter the Navy as a hospital corpsman. They should, however, be advised that they will be liable to do anything. He feels that he did what he did for the Navy, and for the families of the victims. He feels good that the families can have closure. The first emotion that he recalls having that night was anger. He was angry with the people responsible for these acts. He wanted immediate justice. As time went on, and as he talked with the Chaplain, he realized that there was some reason for his being there. He feels that he is getting better in dealing with it because he can now talk about it. He did not want to talk to the press. He didn't want any publicity. His Captain had ordered him to seek counseling assistance. He is glad that he was sought out by the SPRINT team. A week after the event Petty Officer Powell met with Chief Hamilton and his wife and children at their home to discuss what they had been through. He expressed that, even after the fact, they were still amazed at what they had done. He also stated that if something like this happened again he wouldn't have any problems doing what he had done before because that's his job. He told his mother that he was on search and rescue operations, but wouldn't discuss any details with her in order to spare her any disturbing thoughts. Lastly, he expressed again his satisfaction with being able to be involved in the search and rescue operations that will bring closure to the families of the victims whose bodies he was able to retrieve.

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HM1 Ronald Earl Powell

Current Address:

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Work – OPNAV N132013

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Transcript of Interview:

Interviewee Information: HM1 Powell was born in the ██████ in 1960, okay. He has 4 brothers and one sister. Out of the entire family, he is the only that went into the military. He thinks his father served in the Korean War, basically, because he utilized the Veterans Cemetery. After he passed his mother said he served in the Korean War. He joined the military at age 23. He grew up in New York, worked for UPS in New York, graduated high school, worked for UPS throwing boxes. He said "I can't do that for the rest of my life", so he joined the Navy. He entered the Navy in 1983, unbeknownced to him, signed up for TAR. He didn't know at the time that he was in the TAR program until first duty station. He went to Great Lakes boot camp and then hospital A school. On graduation his first tour of duty was at a Reserve Center, Allentown, PA. Then he was

stationed in Washington, DC, at NAF Naval Air Facility. From there he went to Instructor Training School. Went back to Great Lakes– to two other reserve centers. He went to Wilmington, DE, then visited Harrisburg, PA, then was stationed at the OPNAV staff in the Navy Annex. As a hospital corpsman his duties involved doing a lot of physical exams, and running the medical department for the Reserve Centers. As a TAR he dealt a lot with the Reserves. He had experience mobilizing the Reserves in Desert Storm. After that tour he had his first staff tour working for the Enlisted Community Manager for medical and dental rating.

Topics Discussed:

Q: Do you want to tell us a little about that day, the 11th of September 2001? Just describe your day and some of the events leading up to and during the event.

A: That day was Tuesday the 11th. I have a lot of collateral duties in this building. One of my collateral duties is for the Equal Employment Opportunity Team. We had a survey probably 3, 4 months ago and we briefed CNP, Chief of Naval Personnel. So we was going to do focus groups that day. So we're gearing up to do focus groups. We got all our information together, people that were going to sit down, discuss things with, set up the rooms for the focus groups. We had some help from a captain from Millington, CAPT Scott, came down. He was helping us out, and CAPT Ford, also, that works down here. We set up to do the focus groups, got the classroom ready. I think the first focus group was supposed to start about 9:00, I believe 9:00. So, I was down here at 8:00 to the room adjacent down the hall and about 8:30, 8:45 we was walking people into the focus groups. They was coming into the focus groups, and I was sponsoring one of them,

facilitating the focus group, getting people to talk about different issues we have at the command. So we all got seated down around the table, probably, I'd say approximately 9:15 or 9:20. We were having good discussions and the fire alarms in the building went off. We heard a faint boom, but the fire alarms in the building went off, and one of the Captains who was in the building told everybody to sit tight, he would see what was going on. So the Captain got up and went out in the corridor and came back. Being in this building every day for the last two years every day the fire alarm goes off every other day or or something like that and we don't know whether to take it seriously or not. So he went to check it out to see if it was a false alarm or wasn't it a false alarm. He came back and told everybody get out now and he said it very loud. On his command everyone got out of their focus groups and went out of the building on the cemetery side of the building, the front of the building, and mustered in the parking lot. We were looking down at the Pentagon and all we could see was a cloud of white smoke coming up from the Pentagon. A sailor friend said that the Pentagon was hit by a plane, and that was kind of hard to believe that the Pentagon was struck by a plane. So, I proceeded to slowly walk down towards the Pentagon and ...

Q: Did you now what had happened at the World Trade Center at that time?

A: No, I did not know. No sir. But as I started walking, I was called back by one of my guys who said "Powell you've got to come back, we're got to muster in". So as I was walking back up we was talking about it. They said the World Trade Center got hit also, and that's like oh, my God, we're under attack. A van pulled up the side of us where we were walking and it's like all medical and dental personnel need to muster in Henderson

Hall immediately for triage. So I sprung into action, jumped inside the van and said what we need to do is to get the triage stuff together. Everyone said that is what we're on our way to do, going back into the building. So we proceeded back into the Navy Annex, and we told the guard what we were going to do. We went to the medical spaces and dumped out all of the bandages, the IV bags, the IV equipment that we could muster up and dumped it into this big thing, this carry thing. You know its like a dumpster on wheels, bandages, everything. So we put that in the van and shot over to Henderson Hall where we set up a triage area, okay we set up a triage area. This is probably 10:00. We set up a triage in Henderson Hill in the gym area, and there was probably roughly about 4 or 5 corpsman and we had probably about 2 or 3 doctors and about 8 or 9 nurses over there and probably about 10 dental personnel over there waiting on casualties from the blast area. So we waited, I believe it was probably about 1130 that we received the first burn victim and he came by ambulance. He was in bad shape. It looked like second degree burns. He was shivering, he had a blanket over him, and they inserted two IVs into him just to try to get him stabilized. But I believe that the doctors seen fit he needed to go immediately to the hospital, because he was in bad shape, so they rushed him off to the hospital. Then we had probably 3 or 4 walking personnel come in transported by an ambulance. There was one gentleman, he was an elderly gentleman probably about 56 or something like that, I believe he had a muscle, skeletal injury, or something like that basically from the shock of the building . He was in the building. He was telling me when the floor separated and he stepped down; then that's when he hurt his back; couldn't see anything. I stayed with him just for about 15 minutes, just telling him be still and checked his vital signs and just tried to keep him calm until he was

evacuated out to a hospital. We seen two other people that needed, I guess, oxygen, from the triage area. We stayed at the triage area from 10:00 until we shut it down. When I left they didn't shut it down yet and cause I didn't contact home and I know my family's worried about me, so I probably left about 1830. I live on Bolling Air Force Base, so I was still you know very emotionally disturbed by this incident. I pulled, you know, into my driveway and sat in my vehicle for a while cause I couldn't come to grasp with all that was happening;. It was unbelievable, very unbelievable that day.

Q: Tell me about the first time you talked to your family?

A: Well, I left a message because I didn't have my wife's number at hand it was on my old cell phone, was in my bag in the room which we couldn't get into. So, what I had to do was to call the answering machine when things settled down from the triage center, probably about 4 or 5 o'clock, to let them know that I was alright. You know they hadn't seen me for a long time and they had seen the TV.. My wife knows that I go in and out of the Pentagon weekly, you know cause I have friends over there and we have a medical clinic over there and people I correspond with are over there also, so she was a wreck. When I did call over there I got the answering machine. I knew nobody was home and I left a message saying "Hey I'm alright, I'm doing triage and you know that as soon as I can get home and call you guys I will". She understood, you know as a hospital corpsman; what the job entails. So when I got home they was waiting for me; my wife and my son was waiting for me. I didn't get out of the van; it took me about 30 minutes, 30 minutes to get off the van because I was definitely shaken up and in tears. It was just a rough time, it was a real rough time. But I got home and she said, "Are you alright

and I said “Yeh, I just can’t believe what happened”. We talked about it a little, we talked about the World Trade Center cause I’m from New York. Was just last two months we was visiting New York. We stayed at Staten Island, took the ferry over to see the World Trade Center. We didn’t go into the World Trade Center, but we seen the skyline and did mid-town Manhattan, did some shopping there. It’s just unbelievable, it’s like a nightmare.

Q: Did you ever experience mass casualty things before in your career?

A: No, I haven’t sir. I haven’t. Never.

Q: Earlier when you were talking about setting up the triage situation, when you were called to spring into action, how effective was the training that you had? Did you know what to do? How to do it? You and your colleagues? Did you pull it together to your satisfaction?

A: The thing about stress. I think stress plays a role in the situation that we had on the day of the 11th. Some people was very stressed out and you could tell, they was acting kind of irrational. Our driver was driving fast and I had to just tell him, he was a young corpsman, an HM3, had to tell him “ Listen we’re not any good to anybody unless we get to the triage areas safe, so you need to slow the vehicle down and keep a cool head”. Because under stressful situations, some people tend to lose i.t. My dealings with things is, you know, we had a job to do; keep on mind, keep on tasks we had to do and keep it focused. So when it happened it was no problem. We said hey, this is what we have to do, this is why we wear the uniform, that’s why we wear the insignia of the hospital

corpsman, so you know we have to spring into action and take care of casualties and do what we have to do.

Q: What would you say helped you prepare or for what you experienced that day?

A: On the 11th what prepared me? I would say my training my hospital training. Basic first aid and taking care of your patient, basically knowing what to do, and doctors, we had the doctors, to. There were the real ones who saw the patients. We would have seen a lot of patients, you know, we would have taken care of that too, anything they threw our way. But the training, the hospital corpsman training, plus running your own medical department is the big thing. Being the "doc," you know I was in charge of 430 Reservists, that means the medical and dental. I had to make sure all of my people I was in charge of had the medical and dental readiness close to 100 percent, make sure they had all their shots, their physical was done. I took care of that, made sure they got to the hospital, made sure they got the care that they needed, so I've been dealing with it for a while. It was nothing new. The only thing I can say is nothing prepared me for the next day. I guess that will stay in my life forever. The 12th started out different. The 12th started out very different. After we left, matter of fact I didn't sleep that night. I was tired so I had to go to work, got up, went to work. I was upstairs in my office, you know, trying to answer my email and all that other stuff and just trying to get motivated, you know, to do some work. CAPT Senn, he's a medical service type, he was talking about this medical service corps and this HM2 who was on the scene at the Pentagon. He said yes, your buddy, matter of fact he rides with me, said that he was at the crash scene and all that; and I said he wasn't at the crash scene, he was with me Captain. He said

something don't sound right, we're going to go get him, because if he's telling different things, different accounts, something don't sound right. So, I agreed to do that. So walked down to the Pentagon, me and CAPT Senn walked down to the Pentagon. I told the HM2, he was relieved of his duties, but I didn't know what his duties were supposed to be that day or anything like that, another Medical Service Corps officer by the name of Lieutenant Commander Nordholm, he was supposed to work with him. So, I relieved him of his duty and found LCDR Nordholm and LCDR Nordholm explained to me what HM2 Wilkerson was supposed to do. HM2 Wilkerson was supposed to be giving information back to the Command Center, cause we set up a command center up here for N1 for CNP, and report everything that goes on down at the site so they can get a good feel on what's going on. The information they was looking for was the bodies that was coming out of the Pentagon. You know bodies that was coming out of the Pentagon because we had probably, something like, estimation, 30 or 40 people that was on a list, or something like that. They wanted to know, they wanted a count for the people if any identification was made or anything like that. There was talk of going to Dover with the bodies. At first LCDR Nordholm said we might have to do that. So the cell phone, they gave me a cell phone off the site, so I told the wife I might have to be going to Dover, who knows? So, every like 30 minutes, I got on the site probably about 8 o'clock, and every 30 minutes I would have to call in a SITREP into the EMVAC command center. 8:30 we hung out at the mortuary affairs tent and then they began giving us a brief. It was LCDR Nordholm gave us a brief and said basically said this is what we are going to do. We need people to go in there and get the remains out of the building, out of the crash site, and bring'em back and put them in the bin and put them in the bag that's

provided. Bring'em back and put them in the bin and the FBI's going to look at them again, because the FBI is already in there. And it's like here's the suit, here's the glove, that's it. And I'm hearing this, but I'm not hearing it, basically. I guess it's about 8:30 ,okay you guys, suit up. So you know the SITREP, I called in my SITREP and said we're ready to go in the building and pull bodies out. Okay just keep us informed what you're doing every 30 minutes or hour. It's still not clear to me, I guess, I'm phasing out, spacing out or something. So we suit up and about 8:30, 9:00. They led us into the first part that was on the right side, where you know, the impact of the plane was at. They give us a flashlight, we've got gloves, we've got boots, there's a leader, I forgot, he's an E-9 in the Army and he's telling us what we're going to do. We'll go in there, we'll get the bodies out, we'll put them in a bag, so that's that, follow me. We go in, he leads us in, you know, it's like 4 people on an army litter, 4 people on an army litter, because it could be heavy. So we go in there and its torn all to hell, the building is torn all to hell. I've never seen anything like that in my life, pardon my French, but it was horrific. I learned a new word, horrific. But the first trip we made they opened up the body bag. I didn't see what they was putting in it cause I was far in the back, but they put the contents into the body bag and zipped it up, and we carried it out. That's the first trip. So, we take the body bag up there and they tag it and put in a refrigerator truck. And the second trip we did the same thing, only this time it's a toss over a very badly burnt torso. There's no legs or arms, it's just like the head and the body of a big gentleman. So I see that. We put that in the bag, it was heavy so it took probably about 2 or 3 people to put that in the bag and zip it up. So we brought it out. We tagged the bag, brought it out. There was probably about 20 people doing this, 2 or 3 people was from the Army. We

was only the Navy presence, me and the LCDR was the only two Navy guys doing this at that time. There was, I guess, probably, E-1 through E-3 probably doing it and they did two or three guys and they was just puking up their guts, because it was just a very gross sight, a very gross sight. So we secured for lunch about 12:00. We drank a lot of water. The Commander, he kept talking to me, you know, basically about what we're doing and why we're doing it to give information back to CNP; so I got something to eat. At 1300 we put on the suits again and we go to a different part of the building. This time we go very close to the impact area which is right where the building is split at. Before we go in the E-9 gives us this speech, he says you know the building is not secure. Basically we're just going in there, we're doing our job, if anything were to happen don't leave your shipmat. Try to get everybody out. So basically he was telling us we were in an unsafe structure, and basically anything could happen. So I'm still not thinking about what he's saying. I'm probably basically in a daze. We go in and we come across a burnt person, who's very badly burnt. It was a female and the thing that got me was she was crouched in a crouching position, like a protection from the blast trying to cover her up. It was just a torso, and a head and a arm and the other half of the body was badly burned. They were trying to figure out what pieces to put in the bag, because there were like several pieces around, and that one really took the cake for me. After seeing that, that put an etching in my mind, that made me very angry because it seemed like she was very defenseless and all she was trying to do was cover up from the blast area, so we put her remains in the bag. Altogether that day we carted out as a group 40, but the Navy team we carted out probably 8 body pouches. So, it was a very long day for me that day. At 2100, I think, we secured from that operation and came back up here to brief a

Captain. He was asking questions, you know, what did we do, how many did we pull out, were any identified. Two bodies were identified because basically they had their ID cards or they were still in uniform. They could tell that these two guys were sailors, you know. So they were immediately identified. They said that nobody is really clearly identified until Dover does its DNA and all that stuff and can make permanent identification. So after that the debrief I went home and stayed in the van probably for about an hour because I was pretty well shaken up by what I had seen. Told the wife that I didn't want to talk about it, had a long day at work and didn't go to sleep that night.

Q: In all of the training that you have had, I doubt very much that there was anything to prepare you for what you saw. On the other hand there might be something in your training, in your experience, that might be put down in the form of a recommendation. For example, when you, the previous day, when you were put into triage together, this is the first of a couple of things I want to ask. When you were put into triage together is there anything that you would have changed, improved, altered, streamlined, or fixed to make it work fast, better, smoother? You're an experienced corpsman, you've been around for a long time. What you have to recommend is worth something. I was wondering if there was anything like that that you thought of after the fact; we could have done in a different way, it would have made it easier. I could have done something to help my juniors to respond a little more calmly, perhaps, or maybe it wasn't something that you could do, but the institution, the system could have responded slightly different and it would have improved matters. Have you had any thoughts about that?

A: Well, my background on that sir, my viewpoint to that is we're in a new world of terrorists now and the President is talking about what it's going to be. You know we need to have, we drill, we need more drills, more casualty drills like that. We need to put things in writing on scene. You're the on-scene guy. If the on-scene guy is not there then you're the next in line. Have that ready and include different scenarios. You have different scenarios, maybe biological or chemical. We need to have different scenarios because obviously this opened up everybody's eyes. As far as putting the stress factor in it, how could you? Stress affects each sailor differently, each person differently. For that HM3 that was driving, you know, very erratically. Maybe under the normal circumstances, this is a drill. I know it's a drill, no problem. But actually when you get into a compartment or something that's on fire, you're going to react differently because you know your life is at danger or people's lives are in danger. That puts a different spin on it.

Q: Do you know, the events the second day that you just described, do you know why you were chosen to do this? You and the LCDR you were working with?

A: Well, I believe that we were there to give information up the chain of command to the CNP. I don't think they put us there to do an actual search and recovery mission. Basically, we was there and they needed people to do it, so we were it. And I think the LCDR's thing was we're Navy and we've got Navy people in there and we're going to get the Navy people out. Me, being a hospital corpsman and sailor, if a direct order is given I'm going to follow a direct order, as long as it's a lawful order.

Q: A good friend of mine, Jan Herman, is the historian of the Bureau of Medicine. They've been doing a lot of interviews with men like yourself, who've been involved with 11 September, September 12. One of the projects he's had ongoing for a long time is to try to bring people like yourself, who have been preparing for these terrible disasters that we occasionally have, bring people like yourself, who haven't had the experiences that you've had now, as close to the experiences as possible. So its less shocking , the trauma to the people who have to give the care is less. Now he's trying to do this in a variety of ways, especially, using veterans from the World Wars to help people out in terms of training. What would you do, if anything, to help somebody cope with what you saw? -

A: Well, you know, I've asked myself that question. I talked to the chaplain and also the SPRINT team. You know the SPRINT Team has got a couple of psychiatrists that's on there. They have been very helpful with my way of not rationalizing, cause you can't rationalize. You know you just have to deal with it and in time they say things will get better and they are getting better for me. But, there's nothing that could prepare me for that. There was nothing, you know just like there's nothing, just like we have firefighting and we have like listen you are going to go in a burning building and you may get burned, you may catch on fire. There's nothing really to prepare me for that, even if they show me photos because I've seen photos of the World Trade Center. I've seen photos of the Pentagon, and like I told my wife I said photos don't even do it. You go in it, you smell it, you're stepping in it, you're stepping in 5 feet, not 5 feet, 3 feet of feet of water, and you don't know where you are stepping in. The room doesn't look like a room. You know the photos don't do any justice to a structure that's been hit by an

explosion or something like that. You can't prepare for something like that. You just can't do it, mentally or physically. You just can't do it. It's just one of them things that have to know you can do. Well, I didn't even know I could do it. I just did it. They said let's go and it's done. So your question about preparing for it, we can drill, we can have mock drills and all that, set up fake dummies with blood on them or people with blood on them and all that, but till the real thing hits, I don't know.

Q: – Thanks. Along the same lines, let's say that you go back to the Bronx and go to orient some recruits that are entering the field that you've been in, hospital corpsman, what would you say to them?

Powell – I'll say if you should be picked for hospital corpsman you should feel very honored because some of our history of the hospital corpsmen are Medal of Honors. You know the ultimate sacrifice, so that's one thing to be proud. And if that day, if God would have seen that for me, you know, so be it. I was there doing something in the line of duty for my fellow sailors. I wasn't really thinking along the line until, you know, we were out of there and the next day happened. But I would tell them as a hospital corpsman you're liable, could be doing anything. But what you got to do is just keep things in perspective and realize what you're doing and why are you doing it.

Q: What did you learn about yourself? Obviously it's still fresh, it's only been a few weeks. But what have you found out about yourself, learned about yourself through this?

A: Well it's amazing, that I, you know, I was actually part of search and recovery. I asked a lot of Master Chief Senior Corpsman, I said have you ever in your 26 years. They like testified, I have never in my 26 years did what you did in search and recovery the 12th that day, the search and recovery of remains, and that's like wow. It's something that I did you know and I did for the Navy and the people who were in the building and cause they need the closure and it made me feel good after I was done and all that, that I could say I provided closure for that family, I went in there and brought the remains of that body, the remains of that person, out for the family so they know now that they can have closure. That made me feel good.

Q: How have you processed that in the intervening weeks, yourself?

A: Well, it's been hard Captain, because I've been going through a lot of different emotions, you know. After it happened, it was like, why was I there, why was I doing it? The first emotion that came to me that night, I was very angry. I was very, very angry – not angry at the family, not angry at the Navy – angry at the people who had done this horrific act. These were innocent people. These were my shipmates. These were Americans, human beings. So it made me very angry to see that someone could do this to them and I wanted immediate, immediate justice, immediate justice served to these people. And as the day went on, I talked to the chaplains and they talked to me and they told me, you know, there was a reason why I was there and there was a reason why these things happened, and I could relate to that. I have a spiritual background. My mother is very involved with the church and growing up we was brought up in the church so I could relate to what the chaplain was saying. What the SPRINT team basically was

saying that when you see something like this it forever changes your life, because not every day a person is subjected to such sights as I was. So, it is an on-going process and I'm getting better because I can talk about it now. Before I didn't want to talk about and I really didn't want to talk about it. But the Commander talked to me about it and said, you know, it's for the Navy, you know, that's my job. I'm here for the Navy. I am the Navy. So if it was going to benefit the Navy, then that's good, that's fine. But it's nothing like I wanted to talk to like the press or get it out there that he worked on the search and recovery team, you know, and he pulled this out you know. I don't need that type of publicity or fanfare.

Q: Is that something, this process you're going through with the chaplains and the SPRINT team, is that something that you had thought about or even experienced up to this point?

A: I really hadn't even thought about that. It was suggested to me by the people in my chain of command. The captain, he told me when I first got there, came back, after the 12th he came to my desk, like I heard about what happened, you need to talk to the chaplain. I'm ordering you to go talk to the chaplain. I take a direct order, so I made it down to the chaplain – the captain gives you a direct order. So, that was no problem.

Q: So, obviously he had an awareness that there may be a need there and encouraged you or ordered you to do that.

A: Yes sir.

Q: That, I guess, is where my question is, do you think that, I'm just thinking to myself, we talked about this when we were on active duty many moons ago, that there wasn't that awareness? Is that awareness improving in the Navy today?

A: I would say so, because we have the SPRINT team, that's their job, they show up when disasters happen. They're there, they're doing their publicity, like hey we're here. Matter of fact even if they hear about something, like Powell, they would be contacting me anyway, even if I didn't seek them out, they would seek me out, because they heard me, what I did, so they would have sought me out. Whether he knows it or not, he's going to get the help. So, that's a good thing. Because without it, who knows what would have happened, you know?

Q: Did you sit down by yourself with the SPRINT team, or was it a group setting?

A: With the chaplain it was by myself. The chaplain used to be one of my old Reserve buddies, he knows a Commander chaplain, McElroy, out of Harrisburg. It was good talking to him because I could relate. You know me and him could relate. One of the first things he said was, "How's things in Harrisburg?," so I'm like "Great." and we started talking what happened, what happened that day, the last two days, so it was very easy to relate to the Chaplain cause he was from Harrisburg, my old Reserve Center, so there was no problem.

Q: Do you have children?

A: Yes sir.

Q: How old are they?

Powell – I have two children. My son is 21 and my son is 17. My son is in the Army, he's an Army recruiter in Harrisburg, getting ready to go to Georgia and my son is 17 in high school in New York. Then my wife has two kids, one's 19, he's in Allentown. He lives with his grandmother. Then youngest one is 16, [REDACTED], he lives at home with me. So, altogether there's four.

Q: Have you been able to talk to them about it?

A: I talked to my son, [REDACTED] about it, probably last week. I took a week afterwards to talk to him, and he's like, I heard, and I asked him like, he stays current with current events and what not and he's like, well, I heard what you did dad. I didn't want to talk to you about it. Mom talked to me about it, but, you know, are you alright? I explained, yeh, I'm alright, but there's some things we have to do in the military, where we just have to do it, you know. It may look awful, or feel awful, you know, basically, we have to do it, you know. There are people doing other things in the military right now, putting their life on the line, and you know, doing their thing, but he understands it and, yes, I am able to talk to my son, about it now.

Q: Your other sons as well?

A: I talked to [REDACTED], my other son, my oldest son, the one who's in the Army, and he asked me if I was alright, and I told him, yeh, And I told him what I did, and he said, wow, he couldn't believe that. And I asked him what about him, are they going to recall him and take him off recruiting duty and have him go somewhere from where he is? Right now he's not recruiting, but going to MOS. He's in Georgia. He's kind of shocked

to see what happened and what not, but he's kind of the main thing is that you're alright with the Pentagon so close to the Navy Annex and stuff, so.

Q: Who are some others that we should talk with?

A: You should talk with LCDR Nordholm, and you should talk to a Chief Hamilton, cause Chief Hamilton he came, he was there from 12 noon. He just showed up on the site and said, hey, what are you guys doing, and I said if you want to help out, feel free. Basically LCDR Nordholm invited him over to take care of the search and recovery of the remains. Then there's a Senior Chief Green, but he's not, this was funny, he works for the Navy Armed Forces mortician. They're out of, not mortician, Armed Forces, what do they call them guys, they're not morticians, they're Armed Forces Medical Examiners. He works out of Walter Reed Hospital and he was part of the group. He joined and he was on the site, and somehow he got involved with removing bodies out of the Pentagon. And he's like when we talked that night, because all four of us, all three of us drove home. I drove to the train station and drove the other guy home. We're talking and he's like never in 18 years, he's been in the medical examining field probably about 8 years, and he said never has he ever went into the site. When he always looked at the remains it was on a table or something that was zipped up but he never went into a site. And got the people, the body parts or torsos or whatever. So that was a first for him and he didn't realize the magnitude of the thing, so it's definitely something that will be with you for a while.

Q: Did you talk to any of them since?

A: Yes, we talked to the Chief, matter of fact me and the Chief, Chief Hamilton went over his house, probably a week after the event and talked a little about it, met his wife and his met mine in turn and met his children and we just sit there in amazement, like, wow, it was just last week that we was together in that water or that stuff. It mostly was water probably mixed up with chemicals. We're in that building, you know, getting the bodies out. So it's amazing, just amazing. And I told myself, I said I pray, I pray to God, I'll never have to see anything or do anything like that again. But if it happens, if it occurs, you know, no problem, I'll do it because that's my job, that's my job.

Q: Did you learn some things about yourself from this, through out all this, that you want to share with us?

A: Yes, sir. Learned that I'm a lot stronger than I thought I would be, because I deal with human beings. Well not that I didn't deal with human beings, but live personnel, you know, and when you go into the building and you see it, you know, I'm looking at it. That's a human being. But going back on my background is that, okay, the body and the torso of the person is there, but they're not there anymore. That person, the shell of the person is there, but his actual spirit is somewhere else. The actual spirit is with God. So it's not, you know, the person is there, it's just the shell of the person. It's an empty shell but we still need to take care of that shell so the family can have closure, so I think me thinking like that helped out a great deal and made me stronger to do this, cause when I got home at night I can't believe I actually did that, went in there and got the remains out.

And I asked the pastor, I said like what, and he said that was God pushing you to do that. The situations come up, you was calm, you wasn't freaking out like you was talking about the other guy, you was calm. That was God guiding you through these very difficult things, cause nothing in the world could have prepared you for the scene of what you were supposed to do, no boot camp, no hospital training, no mass casualty drills could prepare you for what you was about to do. And, it's like, yes sir, you're absolutely right.

Q: Have you had a chance to talk with your mom, your mother about that aspect of it?

A: – I didn't want to go into detail, I just told her I was on a search and recovery detail. She said the main thing is that you're alright. You know, I love my mother dearly and I try to spare her any of my problems, I try to spare her. She don't need to worry about me.

Q: You say she's a big part of you spiritual life?

A: Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Very much so.

Q: Do you have anything else you think you would like to say for the historical record?

A: Well, hopefully this type of event will never happen again. I just feel very bad for the people that were involved in the Pentagon. My condolences go out to the family but if anything is to be known I'm just glad that I was there to bring closure for their families, so now they can finally have closure, you know. That's about it, sir.

Transcribed by CDR R. Oman, OCT 2001