Naval Historical Center
Oral Interview Summary Form

Interviewers:
CAPT (S) Mike McDaniel
CAPT (S) Carol O'Hagan

Interviewer's Organization:
Navy Combat Documentation Det 206
Navy Combat Documentation Det 206

Interviewee:
CDR Hugh (Denny) Wetherald

Current Address:

Date of Interview:
31 Oct 01

Place of Interview:
NC2, Crystal City

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Name of Project: Pentagon Terrorist Attack Incident

Subject Terms/Key Words: Pentagon; Terrorist Attack; 11 September 2001; triage; evacuation; lessons learned; Defense Protective Service; FBI; carnage; Navy Command Center; renovation

Abstract of Interview:

1. Born in [redacted] Washington 1961. Father a flight engine engineer for the Blue Angels. Father left Navy to work for Boeing. Older brother a 1979 graduate from the Naval Academy. Sailed as a child. Went to University of Washington with a Navy ROTC scholarship. Graduated 1984. Masters in Systems Technology in ASW from Naval Postgraduate School. Surface Warfare qualified. Three tours in the Arabian Gulf area after the Gulf war. Participated in Afghan Tomahawk strikes in 1998. Now in N80 as the N76 Surface Warfare analyst. Mission of N80 is the programming division of financial program division. Write the 5-year defense plan for Navy. Key projects now include FY03 5 year plan to OSD; defending plan. This year the DDX Destroyer plan is getting attention.

2. Biggest challenges to his job – the country has to decide how much money they want to spend on defense of country. To keep current force structure will require a significant increase to the Defense Department.
3. Impact on retention of junior officers. Leadership is foundation of holding on to junior officers and enlisted. Need LTs to stay in Navy at end of 5 years. Pride in the organization and it's history, and faith that the Navy is committed to them will help the Navy keep them. Show junior officers there is a viable career path. September 11, 2001 will give us an increase in funding. More robust force – life easier for ships' crews – as a result of the attack.
4. Office located on 4th deck, D-ring, to left of 4th corridor. To left of where airplane hit. Moved into new wedge the end of July. Half of that wing belonged to N80- approximately 50 people. Bullpen contained the analysts. It was open bay. 150' long, ½ of D-ring. That morning gave CNO the 5-month process of building the Navy POM. Left work night before at 0030. It was a big moment for them – their budget task was complete.
5. Heard about the WTC towers hit and went to other spaces to see TV monitor. Walking back into bullpen and told one of his cohorts that the Pentagon was a big target. Ten seconds later the airplane hit. A crunching, grinding feeling, no loud explosion. Building shook; lights went out. Alarms blinking. Low frequency rumble; lasted a second. Felt a concussion wave. Looking out windows towards E-ring, saw out of corner of his eye the fireball; saw black smoke come over the E-ring. Knew right away they had been hit by an airplane; smelled the JP fuel. Knew to get out immediately. Ran out wing; got to 4th corridor; filled with smoke within 30 seconds. Smoke 3 ft from ceiling. Out with CDR Spence and Bowman. Grabbed his friends, met up with CDR Carl VanDeusen. Went to end of E-ring; door to N6 spaces was hot. He and Trapper (CDR Jim Spence) went into

the smoke. He crawled; took shirt off. Trapper went into smoke and knocked on doors. Came back after a couple of minutes. At this point 4th corridor filled with smoke. No one in any of those offices. Further on down the corridor floor was lifted. Lots of debris. Started backing out at this point. Breathing lots of smoke. Still some emergency lights on. Went into N7 spaces; walking in the section that eventually collapsed. Windows held. Joiner bulkhead was not hot yet. Inside office full of smoke; essentially untouched. All the way down the windows held. Went to 3rd corridor; smoke easing. At bottom deck to courtyard; Army guy coming in with a fire extinguisher came in and asked for help rescuing people. He followed into an alley in between B and C ring. That was ground zero. Dumpsters and makeshift ladders to get to second floor windows. Bringing injured out on stretchers. Second floor was a burning, sooty solid smoke. Smoke streaming out of window frames separated from bulkhead. Third floor same. Fourth floor seemed uninvolved. First deck to the right of 4th corridor was where NCC was; 30 ft diameter hole blown into brick. Could see into the C-ring. From that hole a mound of rubble, mostly brick. Body parts in the rubble; it was burning. Looking into hole was rubble; frames of TV holders; tremendous fire in this space. Raging, burning, all jet burning. Nose of airplane ended up in that space. No point in going near there. He got there ten minutes after the hit. LT from Command Center that kept telling them there were people in the skiff who were alive. Has image of this young LT; not hysterical; saying her shipmates still in that space. 10 ft to left of hole a door that led into a passageway. As you looked in 10 ft; lots of rubble; wet. Hazardous; hot water and melting stuff dripping on them from above. Went into space; incredibly smoky. Went in 10-15 ft; hit rubble and flame. Hit it with fire extinguishers. LT told them to left would be her people. Kept trying to get flames beaten down; went in once and ran out of fire extinguisher. Had to back out. Put out call for OBAs, axes and firefighters. Tried to find

extinguishers. Told others to find firefighters. Went into room again with one other. Like a train. Small CO2 fire extinguishers. No response from emergency services at this point. Buried deeply in the building approaching it from inside. Tough place to get to quickly. Went into building a third time; had to back out due to smoke. Went in fourth time with extinguishers. Smoke filling up the alleyway. The Army Captain went into another door and was able to pull someone out. Hit fire with two extinguishers at same time; had some success. Advanced around a door; went beyond. Hit fire again. Advanced another fifteen feet. Almost to a corner in the passageway; kept advancing. Ran out of CO2. Looked left; breathing lots of smoke. Fire immediately relit to his right and behind him where they had come through. He was alone looking through orange smoke between him and the exit. He was running short of air. Ran back out through the orange smoke; flame next to him. Last time he went in. Coughing uncontrollably. Still no firefighting efforts. He went right towards the fence; knew of a walkway towards 5th corridor. Went in there to go around fire to see if there were people in a peripheral area that was stuck. Smoky, went into C ring, lots of rubble. Used golf club to ram on doors. No response. Went to B-ring, found a hose. Could not breathe. Found a fully dressed out fireman. Told him there were people in the next ring down; people trapped that they could not get to. Fireman said no, we're fighting the fire from there. He then left and went back to the alleyway. Was told that if anyone did not have a fire extinguisher to go. Heard a deep rumble; thinks now it was the E-ring collapsing.

6. Ferocious fire where the Command Center had been. Fire marshal type took command. Got up to parking deck. A security type told them to leave; another airplane inbound. First time he felt fear. The Admiral took him home. Drove to Arlington. It is 1100 now. Called wife; she picked him up. Lungs hurt. Stretched out on couch; really tired. Adrenaline wearing off; friend called back and told him to go to a hospital. They went;

lightheaded at this point. Put him on a breathing machine that put a drug in his lungs. His lung tissue was not seared; had significant loss of breath for about a month. No residual damage.

7. Lessons learned: could not find fire extinguishers on the fourth deck. No fire hoses in the new wedge. If they had had water, could have gotten behind the door with water and saved some people. They were there in 30 seconds, but had no water or hoses. (Assumed he is talking of the N6 spaces). Emergency stairwells between wings. Organization owned a wing; where building made the turn was the end of one organization and the beginning of another. That is where the emergency stairwells were located. With new wedge, there was a door to get into the stairwell but it was only one way. Could not get back into the spaces. To right of stairwell people went to the stairwell but it was full of flames. The plane had taken out the bottom of the stairwell. People on the second and third deck got to that exit, it was involved, and had to go all the way through back out to the corridor. Two exits are all there is. No corridor running down the middle of the ring. On fourth deck could not get out of emergency exits. One man caught in stairwell with no way out; fire below; able to jimmy a door open due to damage to building.
8. Look at design of these buildings. What is trade off between safety and security? In emergency people need to be able to exit those stairwells. Surface warfare guys were the ones who survived. SWOs gravitated to ground zero. Office space with phones and computer were available on 17 October. In a conference room at the Annex.
9. No one planned to deal with this at the Pentagon. Deal with this all the time at sea. Loss of financial database was significant. Main servers were collocated with his office. Back up tapes off site not completely up to date. Now have a daily backup at the Navy Yard.

10. No time to take a break after this occurred. Working the next day. Deeply saddened by what he had been through. Forced to work even harder than they had been, with no data, in the aftermath of this tragedy. When he realized this he was able to take steps to break out of it. Too busy to take advantage of the SPRINT team. Issue of whether or not you are weak by seeking out the help of the SPRINT team. Can't make it an option. Trying to get back to clinic to get his lungs rechecked. Took three days to get the time to do that, and when he got back to office was asked where he had been. SPRINT guys came in a couple of weeks later. No time. Not his way to deal with it. Medical folks from Bethesda, Walter Reed and Fort Belvoir called to check on him. Had a trip planned to Europe on 4 October and they went.
11. He sees the rubble; body parts; brick burning; the fire reigniting. He places these images in a box and moves on. Numbed by lack of concern by Navy Staff, by the way the OPNAV staff was treated in the wake of all of this. Their job was made more difficult by an order of magnitude; job still needs to be done. Navy staff's attitude was that they were strong and to keep going. Many people were deeply affected by it. Would have helped if people had recognized the conditions they were working under, both physical and emotional.
12. Seventeen years of emergency training onboard ship paid off. If this happens onboard a ship he is confident they would be able to do whatever is necessary. Important to break the Washington paradigm of 15-hour days with no benefits. Make people want to come back here since it is necessary to do 2-3 tours here before you understand all of the players.
13. No matter what the environment, SPRINT team is necessary and should be required. OPNAV gave us the option but did not make it mandatory. The psychological impact

was ignored due to the immediacy of the budget requirements. No one from Navy Staff interested in the story.

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Interviewee:
CDR Hugh Denworth Wetherald

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N801L, Pentagon
[redacted]

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Interviewee Information: Born in 1961 in [redacted]. His father was in the Navy and had been the flight engine engineer for the Blue Angels. His older brother is a 1979 graduate of the Naval Academy and is currently the defense attaché in Athens, Greece. He attended the University of Washington on a full-ride NROTC scholarship. He graduated and received his commission in 1984. Prior to his current assignment, he worked as a requirements officer in N76 as the Area Air Defense Commander Program. He is currently at N80, as the analyst in the Bullpen for Surface Warfare and the SCN ship construction manager. He is slated to take command of the USS LASSEN (DDG 82) in August 2002.

Topics Discussed:

Q. Tell us about some of the things you are working on now.

A. The mission of N80 is the financial programming division. We write the five-year defense plan for Navy. We essentially decide where we spend money and where we don't spend money. We work directly for N8 and the CNO [Chief of Naval Operations] and the Vice Chief. We work at that level to shape the Navy of the next five years. As the SCN manager, I'm the guy that tells the CNO how many ships he can buy and what those ships are going to cost. I work

with the CNO and other members of his staff to shape the shipbuilding program over the next five-year period. We get a lot of visibility; more visibility than normal for a commander.

Q. What are some of the key projects you are working on right now?

A. We have just pushed the FY-03 five-year plan down to OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense] in the last couple of weeks. We are now in the mode of defending that plan with OSD and the Joint Staff. At this point, all single program applicants crawl out from under their rocks—the Joint Staff, OSD—and want to fund certain programs at a higher or lower level than the CNO has decided he wants to fund them. It's our job to defend the CNO's position. Specifically, in shipbuilding, it's always controversial whether we are spending enough on ships and whether we have priced the ships correctly. This year, the follow-on destroyer, the DDX destroyer plan is getting a lot of attention on the Hill, within the Joint Staff, and the higher levels of OSD. We are working to reshape that program to fit the desires of all who have a piece of funding the program.

Q. From being one that's right on the front lines of that--here we are in the year 2001--what are some of the biggest challenges you see from your standpoint? How does politics affect this?

A. Politics affects it hugely. Essentially, the country has to decide—not just the President and his people but the American people—how much they want to spend on the defense of the country. If we want to continue at the levels we have been at the last several years, we will see an Army, Navy and Air Force that are significantly smaller than what we have. If the American people want to keep what we have as a force level/force structure today, and are applying in Afghanistan today, then there is going to have to be a significant increase in the funding of the Defense Department. That's really all there is to it. It's very black and white. Either you have the money to buy the equipment that's required, or you don't. If you don't, then you have a

smaller force. Where I see us going is, it's really not up to us. It's up to what the country is willing to spend. If the country wants what we've got, then we'll get the money and we'll be able to keep operating at the level we have to this point. Otherwise, we'll get smaller and less capable.

Q. Where do you see some of those issues impacting retention on some of the young JO's [junior officers] that are coming up the ranks? Also, from your stand point, has the 11th of September had an impact on that?

A. Leadership is really the foundation of being able to hold on to our talented junior officers, and junior and midlevel enlisted personnel. If we can't hold on to these people, we are in big trouble in the future. We need to get lieutenants to stay in the Navy at the end of their five-year commitment. In order to do that, those lieutenants need to see a bright future in their chosen career path. There are ways to mitigate the financial environment that we have been in. You mitigate that with superb leadership and a lot of effort from the CO, XO, and above level. If the junior people can see that they are in a proud environment, a proud organization with a lot of history, with a future for them, with an organization that cares about them, and won't string them out and leave them out in the cold, then there is a good chance that we can keep them. If they feel, however, that the organization doesn't really care about them, and has no commitment to them as individuals, then it's pretty tough to keep them around.

It's hard to look at a guy who has spend 17 years of his adult life and tell him, "Thank you very much for your 17 years, but you are not going to command a ship. We don't need you any more. You can go away without retirement." That's a very tough pill to swallow. Any young kid who's five years out of college who sees that happening to others is not going to let that happen to them. It's too great a chance. We need to be able to show our young folks that they have a

viable career path, and that once they get to command, that it is so rewarding that it is something they want to take a chance on. You do that by having CO's who are involved with the people who work for them, CO's who are having fun, CO's who show that, yes, they worked hard, but this is the most rewarding experience they've ever had in their lives, and it was worth every minute of the 17 years it took them to get there. If we can't push that down, then we are missing the mark.

The September 11 piece of it can only make it easier. A couple of things are going to happen after 11 September. We're going to see an increase in defense funding, most certainly. Force structure cuts that were being briefed to the CNO at the moment of the attack are going to be put off a couple of years. That's a good thing. We will be able to show a more robust force, a more well-funded force. Life will be easier for crews on ships because spare parts will be there when they are needed. The force will be operating. The force will have the money to train properly. The first place that you really take a hit in the manpower piece is when you don't have money to buy spare parts—when you don't have money to steam the ship, you don't have money to go places, you don't have money to train people—so now you have a crew that hasn't trained properly, hasn't steamed enough days to be proficient at their jobs, and you are sending them into harms way, unprepared. That's were you lose people. September 11 will reverse that trend. Our readiness matrix will be maxed out. For the foreseeable future, that makes retention easier. We'll also be applying the trade that we have trained for. To a certain extent, that makes the job rewarding. There is always a down side to that. When we apply our trade, the world is not at peace. In the end, it will make the retention piece a little bit easier.

Q. Let's go to 11 September. Tell us a little bit about the makeup of your office and where you office was located.

A. Our office was located in 4D447. It's in the new wedge, 4th Deck, D Ring, directly off the 4th Corridor, to the left of the 4th Corridor as you are walking from the A Ring out to the E Ring. The D Ring is one ring in from the E Ring. The airplane hit immediately to the right of the 4th Corridor. We moved in the end of July and had been in the spaces a couple of months. As you enter the D Ring from the corridor, the entire half of that ring, out to the turn in the building, was the N80 space. We had all of N80 in there.

Q. How many people is that, about?

A. Gosh, N80 has about 50, maybe more. As you walk in the wing, the new briefing room, OPNAVPEC, we call it the "peck"; it's the main briefing room for OPNAV. It's on the right. On the left were the offices for some of the support branches within N80—DONPICK, which is the congressional liaison, and 802 which runs the CNO's executive board infrastructure. As you passed the conference room on your right and entered into the ring, immediately following the conference room we had the front offices for N80—Admiral Route's office on the right, Ms. Moorehouse, the SES deputy, the EA, flag writer, secretaries, etc. As you continued into the wing—this is going from the 4th into the 5th Corridor—there were offices on the left for CAPT Peak, who runs DONPICK, the congressional liaison, and then the office for CAPT McCarthy, who's N801. From there, you moved into an open bay the entire width of the D Ring. It ran from the end of the front offices all the way out to where the building turned. We called that the Bullpen—N801. The Bullpen was set up with a center aisle, with analysts' pukas on either side of that aisle, facing in, with more analysts facing the windows. You could stand on one side of the room and look over the top of the puka walls and see the windows on the other side. This was a completely open bay. It was probably 150 feet long and took up a good half of the D Ring.

That morning, we were presenting the final balanced Navy program to the CNO for his approval. We were going to push the program to the comptrollers on the afternoon of the 11th of September. We were right at the end of a 5-month process in finishing building the Navy POM. We had been up very late the night before. I think I had to run down to the Metro Station to get the last Metro at 12:30 in the morning. We were back in the building at 0600. We had pushed everybody out the door for the 0830 brief. We were somewhat in the relaxation mode after a very long week. We'd worked through the weekend. This was a big moment for us in that we were finally finished. We got everybody out the door. I headed up to N76 to touch bases with my counterparts in Surface Warfare. My intention was to touch bases with them and tell them what we had done with the program behind closed doors in the last 24 hours. Then I was going to go running. My goal was to be running at 0900.

When I was up at N76, one of the guys came up and said an airplane had just flown into the World Trade Center towers. We looked at each other and thought, that's a rather dumb thing to do. Why would a small private airplane be so stupid as to fly over New York City and—how tragic—then fly into a building? From there, I headed back down to our spaces. As I was walking down the 4th Corridor on the 5th Deck, from the N78 spaces back towards the E Ring, you go down a ladder and into our spaces—I passed, going in the opposite direction, some of the Bullpen analysts, who were headed up to the Submarine Warfare Division to look at a television. That's when I heard that two commercial aircraft had flown into the two World Trade Center towers. They were going to look at video. I went up and spent a few minutes at N77's front office, looking at the video of what had just happened. Once we had seen the video clips a few times we headed back to the Bullpen. As we were walking into the Bullpen, and I don't remember the timing now, I looked at Mack Bowman, who is one of the lead aviators, and said, "Well, Mac, we're a pretty big target, right here in River City at the Pentagon. The Pentagon is a

real target." It wasn't 10 seconds later, we felt and heard the airplane hit. There was no big boom, no big loud explosion. It was more like a crunching, grinding, feeling that was loud. The building shook. The lights went out. The alarms started blinking. It was really a tremendous crunching, loud, low-frequency rumble. It lasted maybe a second.

Q. What would you compare it to?

A. Nothing that I have ever felt before. It was not like concussion from ordnance. It was not like the concussion from 16-inch guns going off. I was on a battleship as a Midshipman. Those are the other big concussions I've felt. I did not feel a concussion wave. I did feel the building shudder as the airplane moved through it.

Q. Did you know it was an airplane at the time?

A. We knew. Well, I was looking out the windows, or towards the windows, towards the E Ring. I saw the fireball out of the corner of my right eye. I saw the black smoke come up and bellow over the E Ring. I saw things, papers and things, going up. We knew right away that we had been hit by a plane. In fact, Mac turned to me and said, "Well, there it is." We smelled the J P; we smelled the jet right away. We all looked at each other and said we had to get out of there. It was obvious that it had hit just to the right of where we were. We didn't really have a feeling for how big the airplane was. I really thought it was a small airplane at first. It took me a while to realize that it was a big commercial plane.

We ran out of our ring and got to the 4th Corridor. The 4th Corridor was filled with smoke. This was probably within 30 seconds of impact. It was filled with smoke from about the top three feet—down three feet from the overhead. I looked left to the E Ring. We're about 50 feet from the E Ring. I could see debris just as the 4th Corridor ends and you go right into the E Ring. I

could see debris right there. There was a wall of smoke down to the deck, and smoke was pumping over the joiner walls from the E Ring offices into the junction between the 4th Corridor and the E Ring to the right. Right at the junction, smoke was being pumped from the overhead, down into the space. I went out with Commander Jim Spence and Commander Mack Bowman. We all exited at the same time. I grabbed Trapper [Commander Jim Spence] by the shoulder and said, "We're going left" as everyone was turning right to run out. The three of us went left and met up with Commander Karl VanDusen, who is a surface warfare guy who works for FMB as a congressional liasion. We went up to the end of the E Ring. I felt the door. There was a door right there. I thought it was the N6 spaces, the N6 front office. The door was hot. I grabbed my shirttail and put my hands on the door handle. The door handle was hot so we didn't open that door. Trapper and I went into the smoke. I stopped after about 10 feet.

Q. Trapper is?

A. Trapper is Commander Jim Spence. Trapper is his call sign. He's an aviator. He doesn't have a real name anymore. He kept going. The smoke was down to the deck. I took my shirt off and wrapped it around my face. Trapper went into the smoke. I stopped after about 10 feet. He was knocking on the doors and went all the way down. After several moments, he came back. By then, the 4th Corridor was completely full of smoke. There was nobody in any of those offices—N82's office to the right, that was empty. Further on down, the corridor was bulged up. The cement had been lifted up. Pieces of the deck had shattered as the deck had been exploded upward. There was a lot of debris in that passage way. You couldn't see. Trapper came back and said there was no one down there. So, we started back out at this point. The 4th Corridor was completely full of smoke and that was our exit route. We were breathing a lot of smoke at this point.

Q. How were you seeing?

A. There were still some emergency lights on. We went into the N7—into that first office to see if people were there. I went over to the window. It's that bumped out portion of the E Ring that you see directly to the right of the gapping hole. We had walked out and were checking to clear offices in the part of the E Ring corridor that eventually collapsed. I went into that office. The windows had held. The outer windows were shattered on the outside. The one closest to the hit had been shattered on the outside, but the window held. The other ones were streaked with smoke, but they held. The joiner bulkhead wall was warm, but was not hot, yet. The inside of that office was full of smoke, but was essentially untouched. All the way down, the windows were black, but the structure held.

The N7, N70, and N8 offices were all clear of people. We backed out and got out to the 3rd Corridor. At that point, the smoke was easing. There were full lights on in the 3rd Corridor. The Security guys were coming up and clearing us out of there. We skidaddled. I put my shirt on, and was running out the E Ring, 3rd Corridor, on the 4th Deck, towards the A Ring, towards the courtyard. I ran down the escalators. As I got to the bottom deck and turned, there was an Army guy coming in with fire extinguishers. He said there were people trapped in there and for me to come help him. I did a 180 and followed him. I grabbed an extinguisher off the bulkhead and followed him into the alley between the B Ring and the C Ring. That's where you could see ground zero. As I turned right into the C Ring, I saw where dumpsters had been placed against the bulkhead with ladders on top of that to get up to the 2nd floor windows. They were bringing people on makeshift stretchers out of the 4th Corridor bottom deck—first deck, 4th Corridor, ground floor—people bringing injured folks out on stretchers. I saw an Army uniform and a woman pulling someone off the dumpster just as I got into that area. Those were the last people that came out of those windows. The second floor was completely involved in smoke. This

smoke was dark. It was burning J P. It was a dark, sooty, solid smoke. Those spaces were completely involved. Smoke was streaming out of places where the window frames had been separated from the bulkhead, but not blown all the way out. It looked as if people—some of the windows had been pushed out—people had pushed the windows out in order to get out of the spaces. But the windows were completely black with smoke just streaming, pouring out of them—second and third floors. The fourth floor seemed uninvolved. The bottom floor, just to the right of the 4th Corridor, is where the Navy Command Center was. There was a big 30-foot diameter hole blown in the brick. You could see into the C Ring. I thought it was the E Ring at the time. I didn't realize that we were three rings in. We thought we were looking at the inside of the E Ring. We weren't thinking clearly about where we were.

From that round hole, there was a mound of rubble that had been blown against the outer wall of the B Ring and then fallen on the ground. Mostly it was brick and insulation. There were body parts in that rubble. The rubble was burning. When we looked into that hole, there was rubble. You could see the frames of television holders that were holding displays up in the overhead—data displays or TVs that were suspended from the overhead—just the frames were there. Tremendous fire in this space. Tremendous fire. Raging. Burning. It was all jet burning. As I found out later, apparently the nose of the airplane ended up in about that position. I didn't see anything that looked like the nose of an airplane—just a hell of a lot of rubble. It was big rubble. There seemed to be some large plate that was on an angle, probably up about 6 feet. Behind that plate was where all the flame was. There was no point going near there. There were a lot of people around there. Watch-standers in various stages of dress—mostly scrapes. No injured people. The injured had been taken out by the time I got there. I probably got there maybe 10 minutes after the hit. Where some folks went down there immediately, we had spent some time making sure the offices were clear on the E Ring. The last people were coming out when I got

there. A lot of the surface warfare guys from N76 were down there. Admiral Blau, the director of Surface Warfare, N76 himself, was there. His aid, CAPT George Kroy, Don Smiley, Mike Lancaster—all guys that I worked with at N76. A number of Army folks. Enlisted watch standers from the Command Center. There was a Lieutenant from the Command Center in khakis who kept telling us that there were people in the skiff that were alive. I keep having this image of this young lieutenant, not hysterical, but she obviously had been through a hell of a lot, and she was saying that her shipmates were still in that space. About 10 feet to the left of the big hole was a door that lead into a passageway. The door was off its hinges, I think, or was gone; I'm not sure. As you looked in this passageway—you could go in about 10 feet—there were wires dangling from the overhead, there was a lot of rubble on the ground. There was water from the sprinklers, I assume. It was fairly hazardous. Hot water and melting stuff was dripping on us from above. We went into this space. It was incredibly smoky. Smoke was pouring out of the overhead of this passageway. You could get in about 10 or 15 feet, but then you were stopped by the rubble and flame immediately on the other side of the rubble. We started hitting that flame with fire extinguishers. This female lieutenant was saying that we needed to get in this passageway, and I think to the left was where the skiff was, and where these people would be. We kept trying to get the flames beaten down so we could get into that passageway. There was a door to the right that was closed that went straight to the flames. There was door to the left that was open, but no one was in there. I went in once but ran out of fire extinguisher in about a minute so I backed out. It was very hard to breathe in there. It was very hot and smoke was just pumping onto us from the flame. We had on short-sleeve khaki shirts. We put out a call for breathing apparatus, axes, and fire fighting. People went looking. I went out to try to find extinguishers. I grabbed a couple of folks. I grabbed their shoulders and looked them in the eyes and said, "You need to get us fire extinguishers. Go everywhere; get as many people as you can. Bring us fire extinguishers." And I pointed to where we were. I grabbed some extinguishers

from an Army Colonel. I said, "I have these, go get more. Get as many as you can." Mack Bowmen went off and got some kind of a cart and started pulling extinguishers off walls everywhere he could. I took those two extinguishers back. I gave one to someone and went into that room again. There were a couple of other people—it was sort of a train. You went in and waited for the guy in head of you to run out of extinguisher, and then he backed out and I hit the fire. Then I back out and the next guy went in. I went out and got a couple more extinguishers. Someone had put them in the alley.

Q. Where they all CO_2s?

A. They were all small CO_2s. There was no response at all at this point from any kind of emergency services in that area. Nothing. But we were buried very deeply in the building. I understand now that there were people out at the E Ring approaching from the helipad area. We were very deep in the building approaching from the inside. That's a tough place to get to quickly. We grabbed some folks and told them to go find the firefighters and tell them that we need help in here, that we need firefighting efforts in here. They would all scurry away. I went back into the building a third time. Caught a lot of smoke. It wasn't effective. Backed out. At this point, people were bringing bins of extinguishers. I grabbed two extinguishers. Another guy grabbed two extinguishers (I think it was an Army officer). We went in a 4th time. At this time, the smoke was getting very bad in the courtyard area—the smoke was filling up that alleyway. Captain Kroy had decided that he wasn't going to keep going to that place. He went down to the left one more door and went in that door. He actually found a guy and got him out. I went back in with another guy. We went in together and we hit the fire with two extinguishers at the same time. That actually had some success. I was on the left and I advanced around this door that was sort of at a 45 degree angle, that was sort of stuck in the passageway. I went around that door and went beyond. We hit the fire again. I hit it back over the top of the door and forward. He

hit it forward was well. I was able to probably get in another 15 feet and almost to a corner in that passageway where it went left. There was a lot of flame around, but not immediately to the left. I kept advancing as we were putting the flame out with this extinguisher, kind of going over the top of where the fire had been. Then we ran out of CO_2. I looked left and realized that we were close to being able to get around a corner. I was breathing a lot of smoke at this point. I watched the fire go "whoosh" to my right and immediately it relit, all the way back to where it had been when we started. As soon as the CO_2 came off it the fire started up again. There must have been jet down there; I'm not sure. The guy that went in with me was gone at this point. I was looking through orange smoke, which meant there was flame in that smoke, between myself and the exit. I looked back towards the corner of the passageway, and then I looked back towards the door, and I was really running short of air. I was gasping, coughing, kind of uncontrolled coughing. I ran back out through—

Q. Through the orange smoke?

A. I ran back through the orange smoke. The flame was right next to me. I didn't have to run through flame, but I ran right by where it was, sort of right next it, to get out. That was the last time I went in. I came out and I was bent over, hacking. Captain Kosnick, the EA for N76, was right there. He told me later that he thought I was going to cough up a lung on his shoe. At that point, it was pretty clear that we were not going to get any where near there. There were still no firefighting efforts. I saw Captain Kroy come out of a passageway, the door farther to the left. He was hacking. He got some air and went back in. I remember thinking, boy, he needs to quit doing that because he's going to injure himself. I guess that's when he found the person he found.

I went right, towards the fence. There was a fence that cordoned off the new part of the building from the old part of the building. I knew that someplace down there was a walk way that took—

Q. Where were you now?

A. Out in front of the big hole and the rubble. This passageway that was right where the Command Center was. I went past the hole to the right, towards the 5th Corridor. I knew there was a walkway at the bottom floor of the Pentagon that went all the way through to the helipad. I found it. It was half way to the E Ring. I went in there. My idea was to go around the fire and come in from the other side and see if there were people in the peripheral areas that were caught in rooms. It was smoky, but not the same jet-fuel smoke. I went left down the C Ring and grabbed a golf club that was in the rubble. There was a lot of rubble in the p-way. There were electrical wires all over the place. It was not a safe or controlled environment. It got very dark very quickly. I used the golf club and started pounding on doors. I went in, running as best as I could, to get as far in as I could, before I had to get back out and get air. I probably got 4 or 5 doors down—didn't get a response, couldn't breathe, backed out, got some air, and went back in a second time. I tripped over something and realized it probably was not a good place for me to be alone. I went in farther and kept banging on doors. I didn't get any kind of response. I backed out and went to the B Ring. I found a hose that had been draped and went off into the smoke. It was empty, but it had been strung out. I turned and started walking down the C Ring to follow the hose. I couldn't get anywhere and I couldn't breathe. I turned around, backed out, and that's when I found a fully dressed-out fireman. I grabbed him and said, "I need you and I need this hose and I need you in the next ring down, now. There are people that are trapped and we can't get to them." He said, "I feel for you buddy, but I can't help you. You need to get out of here." I said, "There are people that are going to die." He said, "I can't help you. We are fighting it from here." I left. I tripped over a lieutenant who was trying to do the same thing I

had just done. I physically grabbed the back of his shirt and pulled him back. I told him I had just been down there and there were no people. I told him he was going with me. I got back to the alley way. It was completely full of smoke. Admiral Blau had left. At this point, there was someone who had a radio and a polo shirt with some sort of firefighting crest on it. He was a big guy. He was speaking loudly and with authority. He was some kind of emergency response person.

Q. From a county fire company?

A. I don't know where he was from. He had a hardhat on, and jeans and a polo shirt, and he had a radio. He said "Anybody who doesn't have a fire extinguisher in hand go, go now." At that point we heard a big rumble—a big deep rumble. We all kind of looked at each other. I'm sure that was the E Ring collapsing. He grabbed one guy and told him to go down to the fence. Again, this was the fence between the new and the old part from the new wedge. He said, "Don't let anyone come this way from that fence. Once people get through the fence keep them out." He said, "the rest of you with fire extinguishers come with me." We went by the pile of burning rubble, and back in towards the smoke.

Then he just dropped sync with us. There were probably five of us that were Naval officers; we had fire extinguishers; we were ready to keep trying. By now, we couldn't even see the doors that we had gone into. It was all smoky. Smoke was pouring out of the hole that was at the end of the Command Center. That fire was gaining in intensity by the minute. It had been for some time. It was ferocious. This guy dropped sync with us. He went into the smoke—

Q. This guy being?

A. The emergency services guy. He was yelling at people. At that point, I was coughing fairly uncontrollably. Admiral Blau's aid came back with an ax. He put the ax down. He was leaving. I looked at one of the other officers, we looked at each other and said, "We've done what we can do." We exited the building. We followed Admiral Blau's aid out to the Mall Parking deck. We got up on the deck and the Admiral was there. He had left to try to get firefighting services into where we were. He asked me what the status was in there and whether there were any other surface warfare officers from N76 there. We were the last ones; George Kroy and myself. We were the last ones out. Everyone else had already left. At that point, one of the security guys came up to the Admiral and said, "Sir, you need to leave this area immediately. There's another aircraft inbound." I looked at the Admiral and thought I don't need to be told twice. That was really the first time that I felt fear at all in any of this process.

I ran out to the end of the Mall Parking deck and looked over the edge. This was the first time I have ever been out on the Mall Parking deck and was wondering, how the hell do I get down from here? I went over to the corner, towards Route 27, but there was no way down. I turned around and was walking east on the Mall Parking deck. The Admiral looked at me and called across at me and asked me where was I going? I told him I was trying to get out of here. He said, "Get in my car, it's right here." So I jumped in the car with the admiral and his aid. We backed out and we took off. We got onto Route 27 and it was just chaos. We just kept driving. We realized that we were not going to be any good. I thought at first he was just going to drive a 100 feet and pull over. But the admiral said we were not going to be any good here and we needed to just get out of here. He said "I need telephones, I need land lines." He lives in Arlington so we drove to Arlington. He asked me if I had called my wife? I said no. I actually got through to her on my cell phone.

Q. About what time was this?

A. It was close to 1100. She had been called by a friend. Fortunately, I hadn't brought her into the new office space so she didn't know exactly where our office was. My brother, out in Greece, knew exactly where my office was. My wife had written him an e-mail that I was out and he got it about five minutes before he saw the first pictures of the Pentagon. They knew I was out. But he said had he seen the picture before he saw the e-mail, he would have been absolutely frantic.

We got out to the admiral's house and it was pretty clear that I wasn't going to be able to do anything. I'm not part of his chain of command. I was completely separated from my chain of command. I was still hacking up black gunk out of my lungs. I called my wife and she came and picked me up. It was about noon when she got there from Alexandria (we live in Alexandria). We went home. It was about 1:00-1:30 by the time we got home. I was not at all comfortable. My lungs hurt. I was stretched out on the couch. I was really tired. I think a lot of that was because we didn't get much sleep the night before. The adrenalin started to wear off. My wife had been talking to a friend who is a nurse at GW [George Washington University Hospital]. I had eaten a sandwich and was watching TV. My wife's friend called and said I needed to go to the hospital. She had checked with some folks. She said she didn't want to hear any complaints from me. I was to get my wife to take me to INOVA Alexandria Hospital right now, and don't delay. We jumped in the car. I didn't complain about it. I didn't really feel bad, but I didn't feel great. By the time we got there and I walked into the Emergency Room, I was light-headed. I was feeling somewhat dizzy. I spent the next 4 hours at the hospital. They put me on a breathing machine that put some kind of a drug into my lungs—an inhalant machine. They were concerned that I had taken in hot gases and seared my lung tissues. We determined I didn't do that. I had taken in a lot of smoke and I had significant loss of lung capacity for a

while. I did not work the next day, but the following day, Thursday, just walking up the hill to the Navy Annex, I was completely, utterly out of breath. The Sunday before that, I had done a 20-mile run at 8:30 miles [8 minutes, 30 seconds/mile]. There was an effect that lasted about a month. I had been training for the Marine Corps Marathon, and I essentially lost a month of training. I was looked at a couple of times. I don't think there are any residual effects, but just a basic irritation of the lung tissue. Captain Kroy ended up at the hospital as well that afternoon.

So that's the story. Lessons learned? We couldn't find any fire extinguishers on the 4th Deck. It was dark and smoky. We'd only been in the 4th Deck for a couple of months. As it turns out, there was a fire extinguisher right at the exit to the corridor from our wing. But I had forgotten where it was. I remember looking around in the 4th Corridor wondering, where are the fire extinguishers? There was nothing to help us. There are no fire hoses in the new wedge. We could have put water on that door and opened it to see if there were people inside, if we had had water. But we had no way of doing it. The last thing I was going to do was open that door and have a fireball come into the corridor. If there were people in that office, we did not get to them and we were there in 30 seconds. If we had had something, we could have gotten in there.

The emergency stairwells between wings—this is hearsay, but I've had it from three different sources—the way the new wedge is set up, an organization owned a wing—at least if you owned the full wing, there were security doors off the main corridor. Where the building made the turn—the corners of the Pentagon—that was the end of one organization and the next organization picked up on the other side of the turn. In the middle of the area, there is an emergency stairwell. They've always been there. Yet with the new wedge, there was a door to get out into that stairwell, but it was one-way. You couldn't get back into any of the division wing-areas on any deck from that stairwell. It was one-way. You got into that stairwell and you

went down and out. What happened was, people to the right of the 4th Corridor, people immediately went to that stairway and it was full of flames. The plane had taken out the bottom of that stairwell. There was smoke and flame and it was very involved. I heard people say, and I've read stories in the paper, that people on the 2nd and the 3rd Decks got to that exit and it was involved with flame. So they had to go all the way through and back out to the corridor. There's no other way out. Those two exits are all there is, the way they've built these new wings. You used to have a corridor running down the middle of a ring with offices on either side and there were lots of different ways to get out of anywhere.

So that was problematic for the folks who's actual offices were involved—they are basically Army floors—but on the 4th Deck, the Navy deck, the offices weren't burning but they couldn't get out the emergency exits. One of the guys from the N8 front office actually went into one of those fire exits and got down to the bottom and couldn't get out. The building had shifted and that door would not open. Now, he's caught in the stairwell with a lot of one-way doors and the only way out of that stairwell won't open. That is un-sat [unsatisfactory]. That's a design problem. Because the building had twisted and had tweaked some of these doors, he was able to jimmy one of them open. But he was in there alone--

Q. Who was that?

A. Commander Brian Solo. He was in there alone and he was afraid he was going to get stuck. He's N8's assistant EA. He's got a significant story to tell. He actually watched the plane fly into the building. He was in an E Ring office just in from our office. He was actually staring out the window, talking to a buddy, when they watched the plane come over the Annex. As they look at redesigning these spaces, he's probably someone that needs to give some input.

I don't know where the tradeoff is between safety and security. I don't know how you make that side of the rooms secure, from a security standpoint, but in an emergency, people can get out of those stairwells if they need to. I'm not sure what the right answer is to that question, but I think that's a problem. I guess that's it. That's all she wrote.

Q. Any other lessons learned?

A. None that really come to mind. I heard of offices that couldn't get their doors open and they continually had to have someone swipe their cards through the card reader to get the door open. But that doesn't make sense to me because there is a "push to exit" button on those doors. All that stuff still worked for us.

Q. It's all mechanical, right?

A. Well, it's electronic. But there must have been enough emergency power to keep that stuff operating. We didn't have any problem getting out of our space. Like I said, with these spaces now, built such that entire divisions own an entire piece of a Ring, there's only two ways out. If your whole—this is a worst case scenario—but in the scenario where, on 2nd and the 3rd Deck, where you had that whole space, that whole part of the Ring at that deck, involved in an explosion, and there are still people alive in that space, to go towards one exit and then have to go back through the entire room-- There's the story of the Army guy that said he had a train of people when he got to the inner exit. But by the time he got out, he was the only one who made it out. Which means that those folks dropped along the way. I don't' know how you design to get around that. I don't know if a different design would have helped those folks or not. Other than that, I really don't have any other direct lessons learned.

I thought it fascinating that when I got down to the Navy Command Center, the guys who were there were the surface warfare guys. They didn't work in the direct area. But there's something to do with spending as long as we spend on ships, learning how to deal with a major conflagration, it was natural that the SWO's gravitated into ground zero.

Q. How long did it take you to get your office set back up?

A. We didn't really have an office with everybody with a desk and a computer and a telephone until the 17th of October. We went up to the Navy Annex and squatted in an office with the entire division trying to share a couple of desks that belonged to other people. We rewrote the program in two weeks with no access to any of our data, so we really did it off the cuff, and off a couple of spreadsheets that people were able to recover. We ended up in a conference room with eight laptops linked to a printer, with no outside connectivity. We had a challenging period. Now we've moved over to the Annex and we will be here until April-ish, of next year. We're back. I got SIPRNET connectivity Friday night, for the first time. I checked my SIPRNET e-mail for the first time since September 11th. It took quite a while to get us back.

Q. Are there any lessons learned with the reconstitution?

A. Absolutely. There was no plan in our command to meet in a certain area to make sure we were all out. Nothing at all. That's un-sat. We've fixed that now. I went one way, and everybody else went another way. People saw me around, but no one saw me leave. Insofar as it took us the rest of the day to reconnect via e-mail, nobody in my division knew I was in the hospital. It took us until, I think, late that afternoon to get confirmation that everybody got out of the building. That was a problem that I don't expect to have again. Everybody went towards the courtyard. I wasn't there, but that's not really a smart thing either. If we're all trained to go there, if there's another threat, now you've got 30,000-40,000 people back into the courtyard.

Boy, there's a target, for a secondary hit. Fortunately, I understand some three-stars were smart enough to get everybody out of there. But there was a time when there were a lot of people in the courtyard. That was probably not a good thing.

You know, a lot of it was, people really hadn't planned to have to deal with this kind of a situation in the Pentagon. We deal with it at sea all the time. My brother's comment was that he deals with security and personal security and a high threat in his job, but he was completely and utterly unprepared to deal with the fact that I might be at risk at my desk in the Pentagon. Once you start thinking about the fact that you are at risk anywhere, then you start applying some of those lessons that we live with at sea and in combat to the office environment. Then it's pretty easy to actually set some of this stuff in motion ahead of time. But insofar as you haven't had to go there, it's pretty tough. It's a tough one to try to second-guess.

Q. What about the nature of the work you were doing and have been doing since? What have been some of the biggest obstacles and challenges?

A. Certainly, the loss of our data. We lost our financial database. There's a whole computer system that does nothing but keep track of all the money that's in every different program in the Navy and we lost access to that database. It took us a couple of weeks to regenerate it. They got into the space just a couple of days after the hit and pulled hard drives out of the serves, but the main servers were co-located with our office. I think they had backup tapes offsite, but they weren't completely up to date. I think they've learned that the servers are now over at the Navy Yard, that we need to have daily backups that aren't located right where the office is, so everything isn't in one place. The comptrollers had a difficult time regenerating their database. Everything was co-located for them as well. It took them a couple of weeks to get their database

back. We got everything back, in the end, but here we are with these brand new spaces and it turns out that our financial database servers were right there in our office. What the heck!?!

I don't know where the N80 LAN was. There were lots of server-rooms all over the building in the new wedge. There were certain rooms that were nothing but server and router rooms. It was the latest design of everything. I didn't have any problem getting into the LAN, so obviously if they lost the LANs, they had backups and backup tapes. All that stuff really was invisible to us. From that standpoint, whatever they did, was right. It was just the proprietary databases, the proprietary systems, we need to do a little bit better in the future in making sure that we have a fallback position. And, it hit us at perhaps the worst time, too, financially. If you could have picked a worst-case scenario, that would have been it. To finish a program, and then decapitate the building, and then say, now you need to redo it with a different baseline, and, oh, by the way, you can't have any of your data, neither hard nor soft, with which to do that. That's a challenge. I think it affected everybody within my organization in that we didn't have time to take a break after this happened. We were working the next day. There were a lot of people just going through the motions for a while. I was one of them. It took me a couple of weeks to realize that I was just in a funk. I was just deeply saddened by what I'd been through and I was walking around in a trance. Things just didn't matter to me. We were in a difficult position. We were being forced to work even harder than we had been working the past 4 or 5 months, without any of our infrastructure, without any of our data, and the requirements were even greater on us.

Q. How did you come to the realization that you were walking around in a funk?

A. I was riding home on the Metro one night, and I realized that I was just staring at the seat in front of me. I'm one of those who can't do that. When I'm on the Metro, I have to have something to read, otherwise I'm wasting time. I realized that I had a magazine in my briefcase

that was 2 ½ weeks old. I hadn't look at it, and I didn't care. I had gone running without music, which for me is a nonstarter. I would just go out and run and think about nothing. That's how I realized it—my god, I'm just sitting here and I don't care that I'm just sitting here. I went home and talked through that with my wife. She said you are just absolutely deeply saddened and affected by what you've been through. That's not bad. Once I realized that was the case, I was able to take steps within myself to bust out of it.

Q. Did you have any contact with the SPRINT team?

A. Yeah. But we were too busy. You know what we were going through. I cancelled this interview here a couple of times. We were absolutely flattened with deliverables by the hour for three weeks after the hit. It was 0600 in the morning until late, late at night. I was trying to get back up to the clinic to get someone to look at my lungs, a week afterwards, and it took me three days to where I could pull myself away long enough to get up and get my lungs looked at. When I got back to the office, it was "Where the hell have you been?" At that point, I was like, hey, I have an issue that I need to take care of here. But that was the environment we were in. Yes, the division put out a memo about the things we need to worry about. They got us together after a couple of weeks and they had the SPRINT guys come in and talk to us. The reality was, we didn't have time. I didn't have time to go sit in a group with 15 other people and talk about what I'd been through. I'm not that kind of person. We didn't have time. I don't know if we had anybody avail themselves of the service. The medical folks were tremendous. I got on the list of people that had been in the hospital. Folks from Ft. Belvior, Walter Reed, and Bethesda all called. I'm still getting calls. We were in Europe a couple of weeks ago and we had a call on our answering machine when we got back. The thing that helped the most was I had a trip planned to Europe on the 4th of October and we went. It was tremendous to be away from all this. That's really where my mind was cleared. We'd been bombing Afghanistan for three days,

we didn't know about it, and we didn't care. That was a wonderful feeling, to have 12 days where I was completely and utterly detached from everything that was going on in the United States. That probably did more to clear my mind that anything else.

Q. How about some of your counterparts, some of your peers?

A. There were a few people that saw and did what I did, that were around me. I talked to Captain Kroy a few days ago. He said he's having a hard time shaking a certain image that he has. I see the flame in that hole. I see that to this day. I see it every day. I see the body parts. The pile of burning rubble looked surreal. It looked like a movie. Brick was burning. A pile of brick and it was burning. That's a tough sight to get out of your head. I'm a person that can put those aside and say I've got those in their little place, and get on with it. For a couple of weeks I think I was just numbed by the whole experience. I was numbed by the lack of concern for the Navy staff—completely and utterly ashamed of the way the OPNAV staff was treated in the wake of this. Some of this was that our job had been made more difficult by an order of magnitude by the fact that this had happened. In our business, at certain points, you have to put aside the difficulties and buckle down and get the job done. Because the job still has to be done, whether we are doing a kumbiyah, or not, you still have to get the job done. There's something to that. I think the way the Navy staff dealt with it was to say, we're strong, we not affect by this, and keep going. I'm here to tell you that there were a lot of people that were deeply affected by it. It would have probably helped a lot if people had recognized the conditions that we were working under, both emotionally and physically, and maybe had said that. But that never really come down. I think there was, for a while, some dissatisfaction—I don't know what the word is—there were some people that were affected by this thing that were looking for some kind of understanding—"Help me understand and help me feel good about the fact that now

we're doing twice as much as we did before without anything to do it with. Recognize that for us, and we'll work 24 hours a day for you." That probably would have gone a long way.

Q. It gets back to leadership?

A. It gets back to leadership.

Q. Which leads into something I want you to elaborate on for me. You are going to be the CO of a state-of-the-art ship, with tremendous leadership challenges at a very key time in history. What are you going to take from this experience and pour into the people that are going to be working for you? And a step beyond that, when you come back to the Washington arena, and are going to be one of the leaders of the future, what, from all that we have just talked about are you going to do differently and—

A. There's a lot. I'm a different person. I've seen it up close and personal. I was amazed at the ease in transiting from walking down a corridor to jumping into fires to try to help my shipmates. There wasn't a second thought. That's 17 years of Navy training. That is something I've always been sort of apprehensive about—it's great, I'm in a smoke-filled p-way on a ship because I have a smoke generator—but when there's fire down there, what am I really going to do? When there are people around you supporting you doing that, it's easy, and not something to be afraid of. That's something that I need to take to my crew. If something like this happens, it will be second nature to stay calm, it will be second nature to execute the way you trained, and to do what you need to do to save your shipmates. I think a strong, tight crew that is cohesive, and has been properly trained so they care about what they are doing, is the key to success in any of these adverse environments. It will be a task to try to project this experience that I've had to the crew so they understand that what I'm doing really does matter. Because, when this happens, I'll be able to work without thinking. I'll be able to execute this without thinking. It's not just a drill,

it's not just the CO causing another day of pain and agony with another ship-wide conflagration. It's not just another day where I'm going to sleep in all this gear in MER-1 access, because no one is watching me. You've been there, you've kicked the guys up off the deck. Somehow, you have to take this and say, "Guys, this matters. This may happen to us." Look at the USS COLE. In port, waiting for lunch. Those poor guys never knew what hit them. But look how they executed! They saved their ship. They're heroes. That's the experience to take to the crew. The stuff that we're doing really matters. When you find yourself shooting missiles into Afghanistan, I'm pretty darn glad we did the extra 5 or 6 scenarios in San Diego, just make sure you knew how to do it. When it happens, it's second nature. It has to be second nature. You can't think about it.

Coming back to Washington. Boy, Washington's a tough environment. That's why we have commanders and lieutenant commanders what work in Washington, and not lieutenants. Washington is an area where you work furiously to achieve very little, and get absolutely no recognition. Now, understanding that, I come here because I choose to. I feed off of that. That's not a complaint. But that is what the environment is. The key is to try and break that paradigm, at least within the surface warfare world, break the paradigm. Make it rewarding. Provide positive continuous feedback to those who are doing the work. Try to break the paradigm of working 15-18 hour days. That's not a normal day. That's a heroic day that ought to happen a couple of times a year, or maybe for a couple of weeks at a period when you have to do it, but certainly not the norm. That's the key to bringing people back to Washington. We need to have people work in Washington as O-4s and O-5s who want to come back to Washington as O-6s and O-7s. Otherwise, we'll never win this battle back here. People have to understand how this town works. People have to understand how the staff works. They have to understand how the city and the building work. You can't do that in one or two tours. It takes

several tours to really become an expert at that. Navy will never properly compete with Air Force and Army unless we have people that are like that. If you burn them out, and chew them up and spit them out as body parts at the end of a tour as an O-4, they're never going to come back, unless they're kicking and screaming.

Q. So, Denny Wetherald comes back as N76 or the Vice Chief or even the Chief one day. What would you do to help break that paradigm?

A. That's a $10,000 question. There's a lot of ways to attack it. It's not so much the people always; it's the environment. We talk about trying to downsize the staff by 15%. You can't downsize the staff without downsizing the workload. You have to fix the process that we have around here--everything from the budgeting process to the requirements process to back off on the administrative load. There are too many chiefs trying to drive the tribe. There are too many people trying to cook, not enough people trying to eat. You get jerked around in 50 different directions. You can't control Congress and you can't control OMB and you can't control the Administration: OSD, JCS. All you can control is your little piece. But I think there are ways to mitigate it. If I were the guy in charge, we need to make decisions, we need to make clear decisions, and we need to make execute those decisions and make it very clear what the decisions are and why we've made them. To continue to churn and churn and churn, and to agonize over these decisions that are being made, and then barely make them at all under the deadline, does nothing but burn people out. Those are the two places I think we need to go.

Q. Have you had a chance to debrief with your brother?

A. I visited with him during our leave. That was the trip that we had planned since February. We talked seriously about whether we could go and whether the threat in Greece was suitable.

We went and found a great deal more security around us and around him than we were prepared for. We talked about it at length. It was good to talk. Very good to talk.

Q. I had the opportunity to go down with our team leader, Captain Gary Hall, to do this with the USS COLE crew back in March of last year. We kept hearing, particularly from the senior leadership, about the value of the SPRINT team. We were there 5 months post incident. They were all dealing it with different ways; different people dealing with it in different ways. But as we talked, all the way up and down the chain of command, they reflected back on the importance of having people understand some of the feelings they were feeling in the process. We found from some of our interviews that there are some in the chain of command that understand the value of that, and some that think it is too touchy-feely for that kind of a thing.

A. Everyone has their own way of dealing with these things. I would say that personally, I'm probably someone who would have benefited from that experience. But I cannot sit here and blame my chain of command for not giving me the opportunity. Had I said I needed to go see SPRINT, I would have done it. Part of it is, I see what I need to get done, I see the work that I have to do, that no one else can do, and you make that call. I think maybe the difference is, once COLE got their ship on Blue Marlin and headed home, the crew's job was done. They had time to go and de-stress. They had time to go back and deal with themselves, and deal with their families and deal with their loss, and take time out and do some of these things. We are an organization that has had throttles at full power and they have not come off. So, we have not had that opportunity. Not everybody in our organization saw some of the things that some of us did. For some, there was a big boom, the building shuddered, they ran out into the courtyard, ran out to the river and went home. That's not quite the same experience.

Then you have the whole—pardon my phrase—the whole manhood issue of not wanting to appear weak to my chain of command; that I'm emotionally fragile because I'm the only person asking for SPRINT help. This is a dog-eat-dog business. This is a business of, are you prepared to take men into combat as the CO of a ship? Are you the future leader who will look adversity and look danger in the eye and lead people into it? Well, if you are the only guy looking for emotional counseling, what does that tell you? In our kind of environment, I think it needs to be everybody, or no one's going to ask. In the COLE, they probably put the whole ship through it, which is the right thing to do. In OPNAV, they said, SPRINT team is over there. Tell us if you need to go. Who's going to belly up to that one? Meanwhile, all the rest of us are working 18-hour days.

Q. Have you had a chance to tell your story to anyone else?

A. I was on BBC. I did a piece on the Friday right afterwards. Actually, they just sent me the tape. It's kind of neat.

Q. I'd love to see it, if you can share a copy. We'd put it in the Archives.

A. I can make a copy and get it to you. It was a good piece. They concentrated on New York more than the Pentagon. Other than that, I really haven't. There were some nibbles from the press, but I was on my way out for my European trip and I turned them down. I'm not a big "look what I did" kind of guy. I'm doing this because this will help guys in the future. CHINFO seemed to be interested in the fact that I'm a SWO and I turned left instead of right. Why did I do that? Seventeen years of Navy training on ships. They didn't call back. I told them that's something I would do. I gave a statement to someone working awards for N76. I gave a statement in support of George Kroy, but no one from the Navy staff really has asked me for my story. I don't know where the George Kroy thing went. As is typical Navy, there's been

absolutely zero discussion in that regard. If they are working on something, I think that might help people bring some stuff to closure. If they do, I hope they touch everybody that had a piece of it.

Q. Who else should we talk with?

A. You should talk with George Kroy, over in N78. Mack Bowmen did the hallway thing, then went down and collected fire extinguishers. Captain Heckleman did much the same. I'm not sure who went back into the fire. They were all at ground zero. They all had experiences. I think all those guys are valuable people to add to the story. George Kroy brings experience of previous command into this, and what that taught him. He's the only guy that was able to think clearly enough to say, "This passageway isn't working, let me go down the next passageway and see if I can get in around behind this smoke." I eventually had that same thought, but the way I tried to get in there, I couldn't get close enough to really be effective. He had the clear forethought that he could be more effective if he went down another p-way. He kept at it a hell of a lot longer than I did.

Q. Commander Brian Solo?

A. From a lessons learned standpoint, I would want to get first hand the stairwell thing from him. I'm not going in one of those stairwells in the future, if I can avoid it. I'll probably run by one to find a different way out of the building rather than go into one of those stairwells. I think they are a death trap.

Mike Lancaster and Don Smiley. They are both N76 requirements officers. They were down outside the Command Center. I don't remember specifically what they did down there, but they were there.

Q. Is there anything else you want to add for the historical record?

A. There were a lot of brave folks on both the Army and the Navy staffs that saved a lot of lives. I think that is a testament to who we are.

Q. As a fellow Naval Officer, I want to say thank you and say how proud I am of your part in this. I look forward to seeing where your career takes you. I think you have a lot to offer the Navy and the personnel within.

A. As long as the doors are open, we'll stick with it. It's fun.

Transcribed by:
LNC Jeff Lüthi
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