



U.S. Coast Guard Oral History Program

**Attack on America: September 11, 2001 and the
U.S. Coast Guard**

U.S. COAST GUARD ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
Operation Noble Eagle Documentation Project

**Interviewee: Lieutenant (Junior Grade) David J.
Reinhard, USCG
Atlantic Strike Team**

Interviewer: PAC Peter Capelotti, USCGR
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Place: Atlantic Strike Team

Q: Sir, I'd like to start off by asking you how long you've been in the Coast Guard?

LTJG Reinhard: About two and a half years.

Q: And did you come from the Academy or from OCS?

LTJG Reinhard: OCS.

Q: Yes.

LTJG Reinhard: Graduated college, OCS, to here.

Q: Where did you go to school?

LTJG Reinhard: Cal Poly San Luis Obispo; a state school out in California.

Q: Engineering major?

LTJG Reinhard: Natural Resource Management.

Q: Natural Resource Management, ah, how appropriate.

LTJG Reinhard: It kind of fit. I was a prior firefighter.

Q: Is that right?

LTJG Reinhard: So it worked well into the job.

Q: And have you been doing Strike Team type stuff since? Have you been assigned here ever since you graduated?

LTJG Reinhard: Yes, it's the only unit I've been assigned to.

Q: Oh, okay.

LTJG Reinhard: I've been told that I have no idea what the real Coast Guard is like.

Q: Probably not. (Laughter) Depending on who's saying that, that's either good or bad. What I'd like to get is a . . . you weren't here at the unit that morning, you were at a course?

LTJG Reinhard: I was at a training course up in Edison, New Jersey. Actually no, Middlesex County Fire Academy.

Q: That must have been interesting to be in a firehouse when the city's burning down right across the river?

LTJG Reinhard: It was. Well it was a whole bunch of responders including a bunch of people from the Port Authority, which, you know, the Port Authority was hit pretty hard.

Q: Yes.

LTJG Reinhard: And in the middle of class one of the instructors came in and said there had just been a plane crash, and we didn't get very many facts. We assumed it was a small plane; nothing that would cause a response. And then all of a sudden they started getting Intel or something that it was big airliner and they were going to turn that area into a staging area. He came back in . . . oh my gosh, there's a second plane crash, and that area started immediately mobilizing into a staging area. That's where they were going to stage all the ambulances before they went up into the city.

Q: Did you try to contact the unit?

LTJG Reinhard: I tried, but all the cell phones were out.

Q: What did you do then?

LTJG Reinhard: I just kept calling and kept calling. They were talking about continuing the class. By the time we heard about the second airplane I just returned to the unit. As you rode away you could see the big column of smoke. I returned to the unit, was here for maybe 15 minutes, grabbed my stuff and turned around and went back up.

Q: Did you go to Activities New York?

LTJG Reinhard: I first reported to Activities New York for about three or four days. Well for only three days.

Q: What were you doing at Fort Wadsworth? Were you there the whole time at the Fort, or were you going back and forth to the city?

LTJG Reinhard: No, I actually had a room at the Navy Lodge there.

Q: What was your job at Fort Wadsworth?

LTJG Reinhard: Working in the planning section on the night shift.

Q: And from there you went?

LTJG Reinhard: From there I went and reported to Edison to work for Andy Confrontini (phonetic) of the EPA doing the Financial District Tasking Assets Group.

Q: And there was a special group set up just to get these corporations back into their buildings?

LTJG Reinhard: Yeah. We got lot of high-powered people making calls to the EPA and they had to create some sort of mechanism to handle those.

Q: So that was something that, at least from your perspective, you could definitely feel the force of a lot of billions of dollars asking to get back into their office spaces?

LTJG Reinhard: Incredible. And being in some of those people's offices, like on the 40th floor or the 26th floor, things like, you know, the paintings they had on the walls and the pictures of them with the President. And you're just like . . . so you knew these people had made some phone calls to get you there.

Q: Well that's an interesting perspective. You're going into these corporate spaces to see if they're safe to enter; doing the air monitoring and so forth. Are those what you were doing? Were you working with Chief Dugery and his folks?

LTJG Reinhard: Yes. I supervised three groups. We set up three groups so that way we could hit more buildings; groups of two or three. We'd first go into the building and do air monitoring and just basically check to see if we could even get access. We didn't want to start leading people into a building that we weren't sure if we could get up in the stairs or not, so we'd go there and check out the space.

Q: Did you have structural engineers?

LTJG Reinhard: No, we had a list from the city's Engineering's Division and they told us what buildings were and weren't hot.

Q: That they said you could go in.

LTJG Reinhard: Now the first day we did enter a building before that list was gotten out to us. That next day it was put on restricted access because the backside of it had been carved out.

Q: But you didn't know that that morning?

LTJG Reinhard: No. I was actually providing some of the photos from inside that building, so it was kind of strange. You would take pictures down the hall and there's nothing on the . . .

Q: Were you expecting that going in there or you didn't . . .?

LTJG Reinhard: Expecting the buildings to be damaged?

Q: That the building had been that seriously damaged.

LTJG Reinhard: We knew the backside was damaged, but I don't know anything about engineering. I couldn't tell what's structural damage and what's not. It wasn't so bad that I was afraid to go in the building.

Q: What were some of your experiences or thoughts, or your encounters as you tried to declare, or see if these buildings were safe for people to go back into? I mean, obviously, these people were anxious to get back in.

LTJG Reinhard: Some were anxious. Some were very nervous. They were all very grateful. We ended up helping them carry down 40 to 60 pound packs down 26 flights of stairs that were all just pure money, and though I'm sure it was their hard drives and everything. So they were very helpful. Are you talking like personal experiences; like what things did I see?

Q: One of the things that I remember those first few days was how quiet it was because there were no planes flying over. Did you have sensations like that? What did it smell like? What did it look like? What did you hear when you got there?

LTJG Reinhard: The first day I was there everything was still gray. There was no color anywhere because of all the dust from the concrete. The only thing you could see was the flashing strobe lights on the rescue vehicles that were still in tack. It took probably a week before any color started coming back to the city, before they started doing the washings of buildings and everything. And being up on the 26th floor you didn't hear anything. You're right about that. You'd see a half-eaten bagel; the coffeepot with the drawer still open, the coffee poured in there, but not . . . nobody ever actually finished making the coffee.

Q: Were there any buildings that you remember in particular, or events that you remember from particular buildings?

LTJG Reinhard: Number Two World Financial. We were on the 26th floor at a company called Gulf PX and we were up there with this gentlemen who we later realized was the owner of the company because his picture was on the front of Fortune Magazine. We didn't realize whom we were talking too. But we were in his office, and all of sudden he looked across the way and there was a low flying plane coming in towards us - and we're 26 stories up, immediately adjacent to where the wreckage was - and so for that two and half minutes there all eight of us were up against that glass just watching that airplane. What it ended up being was an Air Force, probably a reconnaissance airplane, taking photos. But it was coming in at about the 40th floor, real slow. We couldn't tell it was a military aircraft and we were all holding our breath.

Q: I got a note here from, apparently that building: two rooms have broken glass, air monitoring satisfactory, very little dust, no electricity. Entry: personnel and workers must have escorts and be able to walk up 26 flights of stairs. That must have been interesting to have . . . I don't know what kind of shape middle-aged businessmen or women are in, but I guess they couldn't have relished the thought of going up and down 26 flights of stairs.

LTJG Reinhard: Not only that. They tried to bring out too much stuff too. They tried, you know, I'm going to carry this 150 pound . . . so we ended up dividing it amongst ourselves just to help do the load so we didn't have to do two trips. That building, actually that corner was pretty well intact except for the conference room where all the windows were busted out. And then through that window you could step out onto that little balcony area where there was just all sorts of debris.

Q: This is, well three days after September 11th. Was there a point in those first few days, or when you first go over there, that you allowed yourself to stand back and try to sort of take this in a wider context or wider sense, or were you focused on what you had to do and how to do it?

LTJG Reinhard: It took, yeah, probably closer to a week before I even got to sit back. We ended up doing that whole building; Number Two Financial, and it was a week later before anything really started coming down. We were working 12-hour shifts on and off, sleeping, and driving back to Edison. It was pretty busy.

Q: Here you've got Coast Guard officers and enlisted helping fairly well healed corporations get back into their workspaces. What was the sense that you got from them? Was this like the cowboys coming, or to the rescue, or . . . ?

LTJG Reinhard: They tried to give us money. They tried to give us furniture out of their rooms. One guy tried to give us a very expensive painting. They just wanted to give us something. They kept telling us that was their way, and we tried to explain that we couldn't accept any gifts or anything like that.

Q: Just think how you could have furnished this place! (Laughter)

LTJG Reinhard: This place would have been really well. I'm trying to remember the name of the painting that was offered to Tom Telehany. It was a Picasso. That's what it was. The old guy told us that it was insured anyway, so why don't we just take it.

Q: Yes.

LTJG Reinhard: I said, jeez, you know, that's asking for it.

Q: I'll have to tell that one to the Coast Guard Artifact Registrar. I'll say, you just missed out on a Picasso.

LTJG Reinhard: We walked into one room this gentlemen had what was called a Tee Room. We walked in there. It was his own dark little room and there's a picture of this guy that we were with playing golf with President [William J.] Clinton. You know, sitting there with, you just name it, all the past presidents, him and Mother Theresa. You know this man had obviously been around.

Q: Did you have a time to reflect on that later that these are folks that . . . well, you know, you're a public servant who depends on tax money in a frugal service and all the rest, and these are the folks that aren't exactly jumping up and down to pay more taxes for anything? Did that irony ever occur to you in those first few days or weeks?

LTJG Reinhard: Yes. We were all making the jokes about the salary differences. You know we're the same guys walking up the same stairs, carrying around the same equipment. You know one guy was making two hundred thousand dollars. The guy . . . or that any of the enlisted, you know, Petty Officer Wardwell (phonetic) . . .

Q: Ten percent of that maybe.

LTJG Reinhard: A Second Class. You know, he's not making even . . . yeah, maybe ten percent of that.

Q: As as an Environmental Responder and former firefighter, I mean you . . . I suppose in here at the Strike Team you're used to preparing for certain types of oil or certain chemicals. Here you've got

asbestos, PCBs [polychlorinated biphenyls], Freon, batteries, water treatment chemicals, compressed gas, paint thinner, photo chemicals, fuel oil, gasoline, copier chemicals, medical waste, a blood bank.

LTJG Reinhard: We found big Chlorine cylinders.

Q: Plastic and foams from the fire, airborne blood pathogens dispersed from victims. I mean where do you start?

LTJG Reinhard: You didn't. You focused, you know. We wore the respirators and then you watched what you did. It was a whole different theme. It wasn't a group of responders. It was definitely not a traditional response. We were not out there saying, this is the oil and this is how we're going to clean it up. It was more of a reaction and it was a reaction of the mass. It wasn't just the Coast Guard. It was people trying to fit in together trying to get the job done.

Q: Other than the people that you helped out, what was your sense of New Yorkers, of New York, and of how the people coped around you, just the average citizens?

LTJG Reinhard: The average citizens. Well we were there for probably a week and the whole city was empty. You could drive around in golf carts up and down the main, you know, all around the streets.

Q: Well that must have been unusual in itself just being in a golf cart going around the Battery with nobody on the roads?

LTJG Reinhard: It was, it was very strange. And you know, certain roads, they had tore up the whole streets so they could lay down new power cables and auxiliary lines to get some of these business . . . well the Stock Exchange for example. They just tore up the whole street down in front of it. We didn't actually start seeing non-responders. I mean I saw responders do some heroic things and I saw some really sad things. But when the National Guard started escorting people back in and you just, you know, we'd eaten lunch, and by then you were kind of numb and so you'd sit back and watch. And they' be walking. You know, everybody starring up the whole time they were walking, not looking where they're going, and they were all polite. I'm not a big fan of New York and the people are very aggressive there. But for that first two weeks we were going back, crossing that ferry, everybody was . . . anything they could do for you. I think we went to buy lunch in a restaurant and they'd give it to us. Even back on Staten Island they'd do that. But about two weeks, almost to the day, they started letting more traffic; actual vehicles in there.

Q: And they reverted back to type.

LTJG Reinhard: They're honking, and you're in their way, and it was just like, wait a minute!

Q: Well that leads us very neatly into anthrax. So about two weeks later you're probably very happy to get out of New York and go down to an even bigger snake pit. Was your sense when you heard that somebody had died of anthrax that you would be there, or if it worked into your zone, that you were going to be on your way at some point? That this was something you were going to have to respond to, or was it something that developed as it did over the course of a week or so, in two weeks?

LTJG Reinhard: I had a little hint, but I must not have been paying attention. Looking back I had several hints but I should have known that I was going to end up going down there. But I had stopped watching the news. I was very disgusted with the way the media was handling certain events at the Trade Center, and I was tired of seeing so and so died, so and so died. What about the good things people were doing? So I wasn't watching the news. So I didn't even know the letter had been delivered. I didn't know anything from the day it started. But our Commander came in and said, okay, we're going to start preparing for a plan on how we're going to respond to an anthrax case. So she

called together some of the leaders from the group and we all started putting together a plan. So I should have clicked in right then that . . .

Q: Something's up.

LTJG Reinhard: Someone's already asked her whether we could go. They just hadn't found a way to fund it yet. That's the way of my theory. It was late in the evening. I was still at the unit. I think I was working out, and then it was time to go.

Q: This is different obviously, similar in a sense that, you know, you've got one plane and this might be an accident. Two planes are an attack. And here you had one person die, and then it looks like he was on a farm or something. Then all of a sudden two people are dead and then three, and all of a sudden it's a crisis. But at least you only had to focus, apparently, on one thing. So you had to sort of turn around from focusing on 20 different potential hazards to one.

LTJG Reinhard: But it was real hard to go from that - like I mentioned earlier - one was just more of a response. It was a reaction.

Q: But you knew what you were getting into this time.

LTJG Reinhard: Right. The anthrax was not, in my opinion, an emergency response. It was very well contained within a building. We could sample. It was more back to our normal protocols. Set a Site Safety Plan. That was the first thing we did down there was make them put a Site Safety Plan in and made them follow it. And there were parameters. I could set parameters then and I could say no. Up in New York there was no way anybody was ever going to say no. I mean I was upset they wouldn't let me help dig people out on my time off.

Q: Yes.

LTJG Reinhard: It was just a whole different feeling.

Q: Did you know going into this, how . . . were you briefed individually or as a unit on how deadly this was, or potentially deadly?

LTJG Reinhard: On the anthrax?

Q: Yes.

LTJG Reinhard: Oh yeah, I knew the research of what anthrax could do, yes.

Q: So this was something that you were all prepared for? Were you surprised at the scope of it when you learned that they had sent something - I don't know - a couple billion spores or something in these envelopes?

LTJG Reinhard: Well, I've done some research on it because I helped do the training for our Weapons of Mass Destruction Week, so I knew about the spore size and how four grams is going to be a tremendous amount of spores. I was surprised on how - I don't know if that envelope had holes in it or what - but the way it was spread around the building was a very interesting . . . following the track of how it went from building to building and then upstairs, and you can tell whoever walked where.

Q: So whoever delivered the letter, you can just follow their trail and wherever the mail went to.

LTJG Reinhard: Well that's what we did. That was our whole sampling protocol was we'd just follow the mail. That was how we figured out . . .

Q: Is that how you got back to the mail delivery system, to Brentwood?

LTJG Reinhard: The initial sampling . . . they went and recovered the letter in Senator [Tom] Daschle's office and then . . .

Q: Started tracing back to where it might have been.

LTJG Reinhard: Yeah. We used NIOSH. NIOSH from CDC came in.

Q: What does that stand for?

LTJG Reinhard: National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. They work for the Center of Disease Control and they do health and safety, and they set the standards for how you can respond. They did all the sampling plans.

Q: Is there anything, looking back now, as far as how you would handle either one of these situations differently with the experience that you've had?

LTJG Reinhard: Yes. The anthrax case: I would of come down with more than a lieutenant. I was under-gunned. I could do the job. I wasn't worried about following my procedures. I could follow my SOP. But when I'm sitting there with the Sergeant-at-Arms and three Senators and they're telling me . . . the first day I got down there on a Saturday and they told me the building was going to be opened on Tuesday, and I kept telling them there was no way. Oh it will. And, you know, then what did I do. I couldn't explain that it was not safe to do that, and then after awhile . . .

Q: Well what would be your suggestion? I mean would a captain do it? Would an admiral do it? Who would these people listen too?

LTJG Reinhard: The Commander was fine. It took a week, and then by the time they had the whole scope of what was going on, the Commander came down and she rolled right into what was an Incident Command structure. It took me a week. It took the crew and me a week to get that set up. Once she came down she had a good oversight of all the information. But until we had that up there, until she was up there, going, wait a minute, and doing that, and in fact being in those meetings where they didn't look at her like, you're a 25-year-old kid . . .

Q: Yes.

LTJG Reinhard: That's what it took. They looked at me like, what do you know? Then they would ask me questions and I could answer them, and so by the end of the response they listened to what I said.

Q: Is this something that you'll keep in the back of your mind later in your career when you're a commander or a captain, that when you go into a situation like that, that's potentially lethal on a mass scale, you might have a corporate CEO or a senator, or someone who's used to throwing their weight around?

LTJG Reinhard: If they're highly political I would. But jeez, if anybody went back to that town I would do it. We've been on lethal cases before, you know, methyl mercaptan tank cars that could explode.

Q: Of course a tank car . . . people are more or less frightened of it I think. They know that a tank car, if it blows up, they're all going to die. So they back off.

LTJG Reinhard: Well that was the whole difference is that they were in a hurry to get their office space back I didn't comprehend that. What was the big hurry? Why couldn't we just clean this up and take time to plan?

Q: What would you do differently in terms of - not necessarily in terms of rank or authority - but in terms of - I hate to use the term public relations or public affairs - but to explain to people at that level that there's a serious threat to their health? I mean they must have realized it at some point because they did shut the building down.

LTJG Reinhard: They did. They didn't shut the HVAC system off right away.

Q: Right.

LTJG Reinhard: I think they were getting conflicting information. That's what the problem was. They were getting media information and then they were hearing things that we were saying, then they were hearing things from their doctors and there was no . . .

Q: Who was in control of that before the Commander arrived, at least in terms of being able to shut the building down and to say that this is it? Was there anybody who you could go to, to say everybody out?

LTJG Reinhard: By the time we arrived the building was already evacuated.

Q: So then at that point it was just a matter of resisting the pressure to let people back in until you had done the job?

LTJG Reinhard: Right, and do it safely, and what the parameters were for people going back into the building.

END OF INTERVIEW

