



*U.S. Coast Guard Oral History Program*

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## 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: YN2 Chad Pollack, USCG** **Gulf Strike Team**

Interviewer: Sergeant Landon Mavrelous  
126th Military History Detachment, Massachusetts National Guard  
Date of Interview: 6 October 2001

Place: Coast Guard Command Post on the Corner of Murray & West Side Highway

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**Q:** This is an *Oral History Agreement Form*. Basically what you're agreeing to is that you understand that the tapes and transcripts resulting from this oral history will belong to the United States Government to be used in any manner deemed in the best interests of the United States Army as determined by the Chief of Military History or his representative. You also understand that subject to security classification restrictions you'll be given an opportunity to edit the resulting transcript in order to clarify and expand your original thoughts. The Army will provide you with a copy of the edited transcript for your own use subject to classification restrictions and you also, by signing "None" here, you will agree to voluntarily relinquish all rights and interests in the tapes to the United States Army and if you have any caveats you can indicate them here. If not, just initial next to "None." You also understand that the tapes and transcripts resulting from this oral history may be subject to the Freedom of Information Act and therefore may be releasable to the public contrary to your wishes. You further understand that within the limits of the law the U.S. Army will attempt to honor the restrictions you have requested to be placed on these materials. Do you agree and understand?

**YN2 Pollack:** Yes I do.

**Q:** Okay.

**YN2 Pollack:** How would I refer to you, just chief or . . . ?

**Q:** You can just call me Chad.

**YN2 Pollack:** Okay, Chad.

**Q:** Could you briefly describe what, well actually could you describe where we are right now just for the location?

**YN2 Pollack:** Where we're at right now? We're in the Coast Guard Command Post, which is on the corner of Murray and West Side Highway. We're basically about one block from the Ground Zero zone.

**Q:** Okay. Could you describe how you were tasked to respond to this information?

**YN2 Pollack:** How I got up here?

**Q:** How you got to this step?

**YN2 Pollack:** Basically when this happened September 11th, basically there's two trailers. We had two guys on leave at two o'clock in the afternoon on September 11th with one half of the trailer to come up here and me and Chief Tull were tasked on, we were told Friday, September 14th, that we would be driving up here with the other half of the trailer in the night. We drove all night for 26 hours. We got here Saturday evening about five o'clock in Edison, New Jersey. From there that's where we were first assigned to when we first came up here.

**Q:** You were driving from where?

**YN2 Pollack:** From Mobile, Alabama.

**Q:** Okay. You have two trailers here?

**YN2 Pollack:** We have two trailers. The other one is just outside when you walk out.

**Q:** Both are from Mobile?

**YN2 Pollack:** Both of them are from Mobile.

**Q:** Okay. Could you describe your mission here?

**YN2 Pollack:** My mission here now is, I'm a part of what we call "The Wash Group." We have two contractors split up in a work zone - basically Ground Zero into two halves: Zone B and Zone A. We have two contractors: Clean Harbor and the other one is Miller Environmental. We have tasked them with setting up wash stations at various points around Ground Zero for the workers to wash their hands. Also we have boot wash, respiratory wash and eyewashes. We have showers at various points to basically try to keep contamination, as far as the dust and stuff, out of people's food.

**Q:** Okay. Now is this a normal Coast Guard mission, what you're doing here?

**YN2 Pollack:** Our normal mission, in a way we're working for the EPA, the Environmental Protection Agency. Basically our team, there's three teams within the Strike Team National Strike Force and it was basically put on because of what happened in '90, because of the *Exxon Valdez*. Basically we're a specialized HAZMAT group.

**Q:** Okay.

**YN2 Pollack:** But we have also been contracted out with the EPA to various sites, cleanup sites as far as contract monitoring.

**Q:** Now your orders are from where for this particular assignment?

**YN2 Pollack:** Our actual orders basically came from Headquarters.

**Q:** From the Coast Guard?

**YN2 Pollack:** From the Coast Guard, yes.

**Q:** You're just basically taking missions from the EPA as they deem them necessary?

YN2 Pollack: Yes.

**Q:** Okay. Did you expect to be called up? Did your team expect to be called up when this happened originally?

**YN2 Pollack:** Yes.

**Q:** Okay. What kinds of things did you do to prepare both personally and whatever the team does . . . ?

**YN2 Pollack:** To come up here?

**Q:** To leave, yeah. What kinds of equipment were you thinking about bringing? Was there a clear marching order or was this kind of verbally handed down?

**YN2 Pollack:** As far as coming up here we knew we'd need, basically radios. We have comms kits. We have a, basically repeater stations because of the area. We knew of all the buildings so we needed repeater stations as far as getting the comms. We have a weather station. As far as where exactly we'd be used we weren't sure. The Wash Group is just one aspect of what we're being used for. We have people over in the landfill that have set up wash stations there. The Coast Guard is being used by the EPA as far as air monitoring. We go around checking air-monitoring stations. We're also being used, as far as harbor patrol, we are doing, when this first happened a bunch of our guys were tasked with making boardings of all vessels that were coming into the harbor.

**Q:** Yeah, we were actually on the [USCGC] *Tahoma* [WMEC-908] a couple of days ago and we went out to Staten Island with the PSU team, so we're trying to cover all angles. So you were given actual written orders to come or it was more of a . . . ?

**YN2 Pollack:** In actuality when we came up here we didn't actually have orders. We were going on verbal. I imagine when I get back I will actually have orders that are actually typed up.

**Q:** Okay. What are the actual military jobs, what kinds of training do the people in the strike team have?

**YN2 Pollack:** The kind of training that we have, basically we're in OMP Discipline.

**Q:** Which stands for?

**YN2 Pollack:** I can't remember now, it's been changed so much. Basically we have special physicals that we have to pass within our group for basically hazardous material. We go through a 40-hour training with the EPA for HAZMAT and then we have our own training that we give for, on the oil side. We deal with oil

spills and oil dumping. Then during our training at the unit we have practicals that we have to complete to make certain qualifications. There's three qualifications: Response Member, Response Technician and Response Supervisor and to get those we have to basically have signed off different quals.

**Q:** So how much of that training has carried over here, what's you're doing on the ground here?

**YN2 Pollack:** At this time basically just the contract monitoring part, as far as also, you know, dust, keeping masks on, wearing our hat and our mask. We try to make sure everybody is, you know, if we see people, wearing hard hats. That's our main mission when we go to do contract supervising or site safety officers.

**Q:** So you're doing enforcement on the site here?

**YN2 Pollack:** No we're not actually doing enforcement because it's not a federal site. From my understanding the city's still running this so we're not enforcing anything. We're just recommending.

**Q:** Sure. What kinds of monitoring equipment, could you just kind of describe what you have, what's the suite of equipment you have here in the two trailers?

**YN2 Pollack:** Well the equipment that we have here is just basically, we're just using computers and a fax machine and a naval weather station just to keep track of the weather, but we don't have any equipment for us.

**Q:** The EPA's doing the monitoring?

**YN2 Pollack:** The EPA uses all of their monitoring equipment.

**Q:** Okay. What's been your involvement with local authorities and other agencies, including military during this operation?

**YN2 Pollack:** Well we haven't really had, I guess too much of a level around anywhere, involvement with the EPA. FEMA has come by. We're using some of their vehicles they've loaned out to us, they've let us use. The National Guard; every time we come in they check our IDs. We have been - because we have the little vehicles: the Polaris's and ATVs - we have been giving rides to the fire department and police officers if they happen to be walking after a long day or whatever, if they need a ride to wherever, we'll give them rides as far as that type of involvement.

**Q:** Okay. Are you working at all with the crew of the *Tahoma* and anybody working out on the harbor? Are you supporting them in any way?

**YN2 Pollack:** No.

**Q:** Okay, so it's strictly a separate entity?

**YN2 Pollack:** Yes Sir, they're all separate.

**Q:** Okay. Are you staying here in New York or you billeting in . . .?

**YN2 Pollack:** We're staying in New York near Manhattan. We're down at the Sheraton.

**Q:** Okay. I think I know that they have a lot of the other people are staying, well some on Staten Island . . .

**YN2 Pollack:** They're on Staten Island.

**Q:** I don't know if any of them are billeting or not. Okay. Can you describe what types of people, the team, how large it is and how many people you have with you, with the team?

**YN2 Pollack:** With the teams, well we have three eight-hour shifts. The morning shift has five people. Two nightshifts, basically from 1800 till 0200 there's three people and then from 0200 to 1000 there's three or four people on that shift.

**Q:** These same teams have been here from the beginning or have you changed out?

**YN2 Pollack:** No, right now we've been switching out. Usually I think it's like every two weeks. Fortunately Chief Tull and I have been here since the 14th, mainly because we're waiting, the two command posts are basically getting ready to leave and we're the CDL drivers.

**Q:** So these two trailers are going to be pulling out?

**YN2 Pollack:** They're going to be pulling out, hoping probably Tuesday or Wednesday.

**Q:** So basically your mission is starting to wind down?

**YN2 Pollack:** No. What's happening is they're getting more permanent, basically trailers. The EPA is getting more permanent trailers and we'll try to move over in this parking lot. It's my understanding is they're going to be opening up these streets so they want to get everything off these streets to the public so we're going to try to move permanent trailers over there. A little bit bigger - as you can see it's a little cramped in here - so it'll make it a little bit bigger and then we'll demob these back to go home.

**Q:** So what is your typical, I mean where are these trailers typically used in normal, when you deploy to the division?

**YN2 Pollack:** The last time these trailers were used was in the North Carolina floods up in Tarboro, Princeville, which was underwater two years ago. Mainly the only time these are used are basically on big incidents.

**Q:** Okay, and these trailers are good for how long? How long would they typically deploy for?

**YN2 Pollack:** As long as they're needed there. They're all self-contained. Right now we're working on generators. If need be we can, if we were close enough we can get hard-line power in and phones.

**Q:** Do you bring your own maintenance teams for these or have you been using maintenance from other . . .

**YN2 Pollack:** No, we use our own maintenance teams. The strike teams are made up of various rates. We have machinist technicians, which are the mechanics. We have boatswain's mates. We have MSTs [Marine Science Technicians] which handle a lot of our chemical, as far as our equipment, as far as monitors and everything like that. So it's made up of various rates.

**Q:** So what's been kind of, in this operation, what's been particularly challenging given the unique situation with the Trade Center? Have you come across any . . .

**YN2 Pollack:** Anything really challenging?

**Q:** . . .operational challenges or something that's been unique to this mission?

**YN2 Pollack:** I can't really think of anything that's been totally challenging.

**Q:** Not necessarily challenging but unique to this mission compared to what's typically the, these types of teams are used for?

**YN2 Pollack:** It's just when you drive around it's just looking at it. It's totally different than what you see on TV, what they're showing on TV until you actually come up here and actually look at it. You know, when you're there, when they're bringing out the bodies - you watch it on TV - it's a little bit different when you're right there standing and you see everything.

**Q:** What is the, you say you're working with the EPA. What exactly are they doing on the site and how are they interacting with you? Are they just using this as a kind of a command post?

**YN2 Pollack:** They're using this area as a command post. You might say we're like contractors for them in a way. We're contractors. They're using us, so EPA is working with all the various agencies and we get our guidance as far what needs to be done as far as the wash stations. We give input as far as where we think the wash stations should go. My understanding is they have final authority as far as where they can be placed.

**Q:** The wash stations are being contracted and you're just bringing them in?

**YN2 Pollack:** The wash stations, basically they're being sub-contracted. They're our contractors that we've hired.

**Q:** Okay. What types of analysis is EPA doing, the air quality?

**YN2 Pollack:** They're doing air quality. They have air quality stations all around the site and are doing them.

**Q:** Okay, and that information is going to, are you instrumental in putting that out, the Coast Guard I mean, or is that instrumental?

**YN2 Pollack:** No, that's all EPA.

**Q:** Okay. That's about basically what I've prepared for questions that I've brought. Is there anything else that you'd like to add about the operation here?

**YN2 Pollack:** I think that other than that, I mean personally I wish I could do more.

**Q:** Yeah.

**YN2 Pollack:** Sometimes I feel I am because riding around just looking at the wash stations to make sure they're running right. You see these other guys actually doing something.

**Q:** Have you basically been on the same types of shifts since you've arrived?

**YN2 Pollack:** No, when we first arrived we were on 12-hour shifts. Between ten and ten I was on the night shift working 12 hours. Then we went to the three eight-hour shifts and I was still on the night shift then. Then I just recently came on the day shift because we thought these trailers would be leaving this

past week so that's why I changed to the day shift so we could get ready to leave, but it keeps getting postponed, so.

**Q:** Now you're out of Alabama?

**YN2 Pollack:** Mobile, Alabama.

**Q:** Okay, and we have groups from where?

**YN2 Pollack:** We have groups from the Coordination Center, which is in North Carolina. Then we have the Atlantic Strike Team, which is out of Fort Dix, New Jersey here and we have the Pacific Strike Team which is out of Novato, California.

**Q:** There's only three of those teams?

**YN2 Pollack:** There's only three strike teams.

**Q:** Okay. Now you're a full time or reserve?

**YN2 Pollack:** I'm a full-time active duty.

**Q:** All the strike teams are full or . . . ?

**YN2 Pollack:** All strike teams are active duty but we do have reservists that do work at the strike teams. In fact we have a couple of reservists that are up here helping out.

**Q:** Now they were recalled by their local areas . . .

**YN2 Pollack:** Yes

**Q:** . . . and told to report here?

**YN2 Pollack:** Yes.

**Q:** Could you describe kind of the chain of command, how it works when a strike team is activated?

**YN2 Pollack:** Normally whenever a strike team is activated, on the strike team it doesn't go by command structure as far as rank. It goes by your quals as I told you before. You've got your RM, RT and RS. Usually the RS is in charge and then RT and then RM, it just goes by that. So that would be the chain of command. Here at this point in time it's not being called that way because of, with all the political and, you know, the situation isn't normal. But normally that's how it would be followed.

**Q:** How about admin? Do you travel with admin support here or is that being taken care of elsewhere?

**YN2 Pollack:** Right now we have an actual command post in Edison, New Jersey and they're the ones that are actually doing all the paperwork, you know, keep track. What we do here we fax to them.

**Q:** Okay, oh, so that's actually your command and control of that, it's in New Jersey?

**YN2 Pollack:** That's right.

**Q:** How about as far as supply channels? How are you being resupplied?

**YN2 Pollack:** The same way.

**Q:** Through New Jersey?

**YN2 Pollack:** Through New Jersey.

**Q:** Has that coordination been pretty smooth running?

**YN2 Pollack:** Yeah, from what I've seen it has.

**Q:** Did you have any, you were talking about repeater stations having to be set up because of the urban environment. Was the communications difficult when you first arrived here?

**YN2 Pollack:** Yeah. Unfortunately we weren't able to get our radios out here so we've actually borrowed some radios here. We're not able to communicate as far as with radios to the command post or with the landfill stations, so mainly just around here we were using cell phones.

**Q:** That's one of the things that's come out - at least the interviews that we've been doing - is that almost every branch and some agencies have been using cell phones quite a bit and the problem that we've noticed is simply trying to keep track of communications, and logs and so forth are not being kept because people are just using the cell phones.

**YN2 Pollack:** Right, we're just using the cell phones.

**Q:** It's just kind of an interesting thing. I keep hearing every different group we go to has been using cell phones heavily and I guess because of the urban environment they have such good coverage. Another thing that's come about because of the cell phone usage is operational security. Is there anything you do here that's sensitive material, that that's been a problem with?

**YN2 Pollack:** No, most of it's not really classified.

**Q:** Okay. If there's nothing else you have for comments, go ahead and finish off the form. So your unit is essentially a strike, that's the whole unit where you come from is just a strike team?

**YN2 Pollack:** We're called an Oil Strike Team.

**Q:** Oil Strike Team.

**YN2 Pollack:** Our area of coverage goes from North Carolina all the way to New Mexico and all the Caribbean. The Galapagos Islands, we were there - you maybe saw on CNN - that was us.

**Q:** Okay. How many people, this is obviously just a small portion of the team?

**YN2 Pollack:** Just a small portion. Basically each team has about 43 active members. Seven of them are officers and the rest are enlisted and we have like 43 reservists that work as far as supplement.

**Q:** So your assets are basically the trailers that you brought to this mission?

**YN2 Pollack:** Right now, yeah, this is what we have. Being though what we didn't bring here, we brought, you know, like I said we can handle, we have Level Aces, Level B. We're a HAZMAT unit. We deal with oil and chemicals.

**Q:** Okay, anything else?

**YN2 Pollack:** No.

**Q:** That'll do it. Okay. That concludes the interview.

**END OF INTERVIEW**

