

## Interview Summary Form

## Interview Details

Interviewee Name:	<b>CAPT Jim McPherson</b>	Date:	<b>10/28/2010</b>	Time:	<b>3:30pm</b>
Interviewee Title:	<b>JIC/External Affairs</b>	Interviewee Job Location:	<b>New Orleans, LA</b>		
Interviewer Name(s):	<b>Shaneyfelt, Pollack, Johnson, Parker, Moore, Casey, Burger</b>	Interview Location:	<b>Conference Call</b>		

## Interview Questions

Initial Question 1: What was your job/role and how did it evolve (if at all) during the DEEPWATER HORIZON Incident?	
Focus Area:	<b>Question 1: Could you speak to the evolution of the JIC function at the ICPs and UAC from the beginning until the end that you had visibility on?</b>
Focus Area:	<b>Question 2: What was the influence of the NIC?</b>
Focus Area:	<b>Question 3: How was the JIC stood up? Was interoperability an issue during initial operations? Was there a sufficient amount of communications equipment?</b>
Focus Area:	<b>Question 4: In your opinion, was there open communication flow? Did the JIC message output get complicated when things shifted to the UAC?</b>
Focus Area:	<b>Question 5: Role in the recent SONS exercise in Maine, served as Deputy IC or IC? Did you learn anything that carried over the DWH event? Any lessons learned from CB external affairs that translated to the DWH event?</b>
Focus Area:	<b>Question 6: What type of media relations campaign should be stood up, given the excessive demand for public demand and transparency during a SONS event like this?</b>
Final Question 1: What were the top 2 "best practice(s)" during this incident, from your perspective?	
What do you assess to be the top 2 "areas needing improvement" (or downright "failures") from your perspective, and do you have any related recommendations regarding these areas?	
Final Question 2:	
Final Question 3: Is there anything else we should know?	
Final Question 4: Who else should we interview?	

**What was your job/role and how did it evolve (if at all) during the DEEPWATER HORIZON Incident?**

- CAPT McPherson's job started on June 2<sup>nd</sup> when he arrived in New Orleans.
- At this point, the JIC was handling yesterday's mail; there was no strategy.
- He was sent because of his public affairs experience, and his experience with the SONS 2010 exercise.
- His job was to lead strategic communications and develop the message that needed to come out the following week; he coordinated with the department, FOSC, and NIC.
- He was deployed until August 2<sup>nd</sup>.

**When you arrived, were the ICPs set up? Were JICs?**

- Yes, there were all stood up when he arrived.

**Someone said that a "gag order" was put on the ICP JICs, what is your opinion?**

- A "gag order" is too strong; it was not a "gag order". The message was getting lost.
- USCG is good at the first 48 hrs, standing up and talking about what we are doing, if we own it, we can talk about it. About a month into it, the ICPs were getting disorganized in their message, they were not providing media access to the well site, beaches and they were not providing a coherent message.

- Some were talking about dispersants, and the message was contradictory to what the head of EPA was reporting.
- CAPT McPherson was looking at things objectively.
- He has had public affairs experience in Katrina, Bosnia, etc.
- The public affairs function had become dysfunctional. The scope of the event was so big that the normal rules did not apply and they needed to have a spokesperson.
- Senior reps were speaking and contradicting ADM Allen. Message was to stop and come together with one voice – ADM Allen became that person to provide the message, as he had the best overall picture.

#### **Were ICPs were given specific direction to not speak to or respond to messages from the media?**

- No, that was not part of the direction.
- Nuances were to not speak to the policy or the investigation pieces, focus only on what we “had ownership of.”
- There is a bigger problem with how we do public affairs; we had junior people with little experience that were setting things up.
- In Haiti, when we set up the JIC at the Embassy, it was SES and O-6 levels talking.
- It was such a big scale, that we needed to rein things in, and ensure we were proceeding forward with a unified message.
- He worked to get media access to the well site when he arrived, without a need to spin the message; it was clear once you saw it. It is a floating city out by the well site.
- He saw his job as a liaison position.
- We never stopped doing local media spots.
- There was a concern with a Junior Warrant Officer conducting a back order brief to the Wall Street Journal on dispersants.
- USCG does not know how to do public relations in a crisis, our process works for the search and rescue missions; it is a process is based on photojournalists speaking to what they are seeing.

#### **Bottom line objective is response organization developed through NCP and AMSTEP that is constantly tweaked after exercises and real response. In this response, what didn’t work well in NIMS/ICS, or what ad hoc things happened that need to be looked at or recommended for future responses?**

- It was frustrating because we keep making the same mistakes; same mistakes made during Cosco Busan.
- Two of our best oil spill guys got into trouble/fired due to media (I don’t believe one was at DWH but I’m not sure) CB and DWH event have the fact in common that the lead person was relieved because the public affairs training let them down.
- USCG does not have a crisis communications training program.

#### **How was the JIC at UAC focused up and outwards?**

- JIC was overwhelmed and responding to media queries. There was no messaging or crisis strategy. They were completely reactive, trying to find out what happened yesterday to report back.
- External affairs, in the UAC, was trying to develop that message and it was a very difficult job.
- CAPT McPherson worked to find out what was going wrong with the messaging.
- The event ended up having unprecedented media access as we had never before put media on a cutter and let them broadcast live. We used innovative ideas, including putting a satellite dish on the deck of a cutter.
- Can use software provided by PIER Systems to show the positive media that was shown once we got them to the well site. Speak to someone like Jeffery Kaufman from ABC News – good to see that opinion.

- By that point, we had already seen oil on beaches.
- Strategic message was to change from “largest oil spill disaster in the US” to “largest oil spill response in the US”.
- Policy that if you own it, you can talk about it was still in effect. Could do interviews on any of the stuff that we owned, but no one cared about that. Gag order just meant don’t talk policy. NIC talks policy.
- The hard part was that we had to show that we had made mistakes, but to ask for the confidence that we did know what we were doing. When “day in the life of an IC” came out, they were completely supportive.
- When they understood what we wanted to do, they set up a conference call with all executive producers in the networks (CBS, NBC, ABC, etc.) and we offered unprecedented access, which changed things (this was around the middle of June). The media stories can be accessed through BP or PIER Systems.
- The tone of the stories changed from negative to neutral or positive when we showed what we were doing offshore. This is a lesson learned that we need to have someone to coordinate this – whatever you call it – at the UAC from the beginning. This needs to be coordinated between the DHS, USCG, NIC, BP, UAC, and passed down to external affairs at ICP so it can be run through the JIC.

**As developing the messaging going from disaster to response, what approvals did you need to obtain to put together this program? Did it go to the NIC or the White House for approval?**

- CAPT McPherson coordinated with DHS; he also spoke to RADM Nash and RADM Watson. It was common sense, but implementing it was in getting the USCG Cutter there. If didn’t have media, then you were wasting a trip.
- Never had this many media embeds for this length of time.
- Problem was it was a month too late.

**Was there a sufficient amount of communications equipment? Was there any time delay getting what you needed?**

- Example: if you were the top story on CNN repeatedly, you are big news. We had the problem getting the cutter onsite at the well site; we had more cutters at Fleet Week than in the Gulf.
- Getting permission to get the cutter and satellite there was a huge logistical effort. This needs to be pre-loaded, and didn’t need to be a discussion at that point. ADM Allen got it, and was fully supportive. It was the same with getting the aircraft out there.
- The blimp could have been a good tool. The Navy was a complete obstruction to not understanding the purpose of that mission and things like that were extremely frustrating.
- Same with Navy sending combat camera crews – they were not used properly so they left. Should have been on-scene showing what was happening on-scene.
- I Don’t understand why every helicopter and cutter does not have an on-board camera if all local police cars can have them.
- CAPT McPherson is very passionate about PA, doesn’t matter what you do; success is defined by what the media says you did. Seeing the level of activity going on that was not reported on was frustrating.

**When talking about “one message” and saying if you own it, you can talk about it, but not talk about policy. There was probably a period of time when media was frustrated, was this the time that they turned to Parish Presidents, State Governors, and others and got the wrong message?**

- Absolutely. CAPT McPherson went to see Anderson Cooper, and said that you have to stop saying the Federal government is not responding to your queries. He provided his cell, home and all contact information to Anderson Cooper, who then said “oh no, the USCG is providing everything we need, it is just the Federal government that is not...”
- One of the most effective things we did was host a third party validation meeting. We had ADM Allen provide an in depth understanding of what was happening. This meeting included General Honore, and

CAPT McPherson had to tell him how he heard he was about to be fired by CNN as they were embarrassed by his comments.

- We needed to get ADM Allen to speak about what was happening. The media only prohibited from access for safety or security reasons. ADM Allen said that right along.

#### **What led to senior USCG officers being sent so late?**

- Leadership decision was that we could not have Sector Commanders going, they need to stay at the Sector, and then we ended up having 4-5 Sector Commanders go at the same time. We needed to go in heavy from the beginning, set it up, and then hand things over to the junior officers.
- USCG public affairs model is search and rescue based; SAR model works for a lieutenant that is learning, but it does not work for a long-term crisis.
- He recommends that USCG has a crisis team that is DHS or USCG, led by SES or senior officers.

#### **Several State Governors or local officials were criticizing messaging. What attempts were made to reach them and get them to understand the importance of what you were doing?**

- When Hurricane Bonnie was coming, we met with Governor Jindal and acknowledged that all houses are 18ft above sea level; all national assets and boom are below sea level. He agreed, and said that it was a fantastic idea/smart to move assets out, as we know from Katrina the potential for damage. The Governor then met with Parish Presidents and then went to press conference and said that USCG is “stealing our gear.” It was pure politics.
- The biggest problem was that there was no shared responsibility. Everyone twisted the information to make it as politically supportable from their viewpoint.
- No shared responsibility from senior reps in state government.
- Big misrepresentation was that no one told us what was happening. They signed off on IAPs; they signed off on ACP and sat in command center. When Governor saw someone’s name on a report, they were fired.

#### **During the recent SONS exercise in Maine you served as Deputy IC or IC? Did you learn anything that carried over the DWH event? Any lessons learned from CB external affairs that translated to the DWH event?**

- He has learned that it has to be a senior level team that gets the right process stood up, not to spin it, but to get the message put out, good or bad.
- In SONS, we knew that first report is always wrong, but have to err on side of maximum capacity that can be spilled. He also knew from the SONS exercise, that they should have said max capacity (WCD), not the 1K or 5K bpd numbers.
- Within the scope of a 5 state event, there was enough room for everyone to give what they thought was the best thing.
- NIC/UAC and who is providing guidance? There seemed to be an operations cell at the UAC. Just like during an exercise we say that we are not setting up Ops at UAC, but how can you not do that?
- As we did during CB, we had volunteers show up. People were arrested on the beaches. We were not prepared for it in CB or DWH.
  - When CAPT McPherson first arrived he made a list of things to expect: debris management issues, issues management, claims fraud, volunteers, inventors, etc.
  - The worst time for inventors and volunteers to show up is during an event; learned this during CB and yet we were still not prepared for this.
  - We made an effort to limit VIPs. It was all reactionary; no plan was in place to address VIPs before the event or from beginning of the response.
- We need to have a cell in the UAC fully manned from day one to deal with VIPs.

- Plan to deal with VIPs came together, but it wasn't from 1<sup>st</sup> day. Not including President and VP visits (they are easy, as it is completely organized by the White House when they are arriving). When congressmen and senators don't come with the built in transportation mechanism and that kills you.
- Information management is also an issue; everyone is walking around with a piece of paper, but no one knew how their piece connected to anyone else.
- We know up front that these events are going to go for 60 days at least and yet we had people come in that were not ICS trained, and had unrealistic demands (work for 4 days and then go to a wedding, take leave, etc.). Need to have 30-45 day minimum rotation, maybe develop alert teams.
- There was no sense of urgency in beginning; we have to stand up 24/7 for the first few days.

#### **Best Practice**

- ICS structure is absolutely incredible; people can walk in, sit down at a desk, and know what to do. That has to be applauded.

#### **Area for Improvement and Recommendation**

- F&W or State Department come in, say they will sit in JIC, but not sharing information, will only send it through their agency chain of command. Had the same experience with Louisiana National Guard.
- ICS is great if you are trained and know how to do the response.
- F&W thought they were coming to support F&W not UAC. We need to have training to explain how ICS structure works and ensure that people know what they will be doing when they deploy to respond to an event.