

Interview Summary Form

Interview Details

Interviewee Name:	<u>CAPT Willard Ellis</u>	Date:	<u>9/21/10</u>	Time:	<u>1:30pm</u>
Interviewee Title:	<u>Liaison Officer, UAC</u>	Interviewee Job Location:	<u>Robert, LA & New Orleans, LA</u>		
Interviewer Name(s):	<u>Team</u>	Interview Location:	<u>New Orleans, LA</u>		

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: UAC/ICP	Question 1: How was information flow coordinated from the UAC to the ICPs and the up to the NIC?
Focus Area: External Comms	Question 2: How did you work with BP to address the parish and county needs? Early on there was a decision to give money directly to the parishes, were you aware of that?
Focus Area: External Comms	Question 3: With regard to messaging, is there coordination between the LNOs and the JIC? Are you coordinating to ensure it is a similar message?
Focus Area: NRF	Question 4: Did you find much confusion at the parish level on a Stafford Act vs. NCP response?

Final Question 1: What were the top 2 "best practice(s)" during this incident, from your perspective?

Final Question 2: 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 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?

- Initially was asked to serve as a Deputy IC (served this role for 8 days in Mobile), but was then sent to the UAC to serve as Coordinator for the LNO Program across the AOR.
- ICS title was Liaison Officer for Area Commander – under the Liaison Program; there were Parish President LNOs or county LNOs.
- There were deputy LNOs in the branches; job was to keep elected officials informed and collect issues and ensure that was reported back to the UAC.
- Branch was an ICS operational branch – located in specific counties or parishes. Originally branches were along the ICS construct.
- LNO at Parish level were at the 05 level, a few were 04s.

How was information flow coordinated from the UAC to the ICPs and the up to the NIC? What was the organizational structure outside of the S2 chain? Was tactical direction implied or expressed?

- Reporting chain was to the Deputy Secretary and then up to Assistant Secretary Kayyem as well as to RADM Zukunft. CAPT Ellis did not have coordination with the NIC.
- CAPT Ellis was not present when the S2 reporting chain was stood up, but his understanding was that there was a need to implement the program on behalf of ADM Allen and CAPT Roger Forrester was tasked with developing procedures to stand up parish president LNO program.
- CAPT Ellis would listen and participate in the daily S2 calls. His experience with the calls was that the LNOs (county, parish and state EOCs) would alternate briefing daily. The calls were with the Assistant Secretary Kayyem. The calls would discuss the reports from the LNOs and the general purpose was to get further information from the reports; following the calls, Assistant Secretary Kayyem would contact and discuss any questions or direction directly with RADM Zukunft.
- Frequency of the calls went from 7 days a week to 5 days a week, etc.
- There were 70 LNOs.
- There was a daily written report for the LNOs that included weekly/daily engagements, resolved issues, etc.
- When CAPT Ellis came in, the LNO program was more reactionary and working to track down requests for information (RFIs). To assist, they pushed fact sheets down, and tried to help the LNOs to get any information that they might need. We tried to ensure a proactive posture with the LNO program so that they had the information they needed to coordinate at their level, including a strategic viewpoint on the overall response.
- We also worked to ensure that they clearly understood the operational commanders' intent and that everything they did was aligned with it.
- Official title per ICS was LNO, though CAPT Ellis was the Liaison Coordinator – he coordinated the entire program and how to report back to S2 and ICS organization. The LNOs reported to the S2 through CAPT Ellis.
- ICP Houma was more cognizant of what the LNOs were doing. In Mobile, things were going well, so it did not appear that the ICP was cognizant of what we were doing. We had good LNOs in FL, AL, and MS. They were designated as Deputy ICs. We didn't have this in LA, because we had the UAC and ICP Houma. The LNO in LA could not direct tactical direction but they could in the other states.
- Deputy ICs were not LNOs, but I coordinated with them closely as they knew what was happening in those states. The LNOs had parallel reporting – reporting to ICP and also to the LNO coordinator at the UAC.

How did you work with BP to address the parish and county needs?

- If it was something that was related to a BP program that was in existence, we would work with the BP Coordinator that was located in the branches. When needed, we would bring them to the meetings to answer the questions of the local officials directly.
- Most of my experience was related to the VOO program, but now it is related to NRDA and the Gulf Coast Recovery Office.

Will the LNOs tie into economic recovery? Will there be overlap between recovery and response?

- CAPT Ellis did not know how the LNOs will fold into the economic systems task force. This is still pre-decisional.
- There is going to be overlap between response and recovery, and CAPT Ellis heard that the plan is to use LNOs as resources to help get messages out, as they are available.
- Gulf Coast restoration is only touched on to the point that there was an explosion that resulted in 11 deaths, and then had an oil spill, worked to put out the fire, and now we are coming to closure on the oil – big component is the subsurface monitoring program – to identify if there is any oil that exists that we can get assets on to recover. Based on this information, we think the chance of re-flash or re-oiling is non-existent.
- NRDA is occurring now and we are moving into the rebuilding and restoration phase.

Early on there was a decision to give money directly to the parishes, were you aware of that?

- No. BP has been doing some stuff independently, such as working the berm issue in Louisiana (\$360million).
- CAPT Ellis was not aware of anything at the parish level.

With regard to messaging, is there coordination between the LNO Program, LNOs and the JIC? Are you coordinating to ensure it is a similar message?

- More so now, early on the JIC was focused on national media and the local media was coordinated directly at the LNO level.
- We had copies and would provide copies of reports, especially if we thought it was beneficial.
- Now LNOs are doing briefings and helping to set up and coordinate meetings for local elected officials and the public. We just developed a joint external communications plan to work this issue.

Is BP doing outreach at the Parish level separate from the LNO program? If not, how does this impact your efficiency to do your job?

- Yes, BP was working their claims process; they would attend the same meetings where we were discussing the response.
- Would also get visibility on what was happening with their efforts.

What was the local influence on critical resources (boom, skimmers, etc.)? What role, if any, did the LNOs play?

- The process was going on before CAPT Ellis. When he arrived he wanted to work to help demob those resources and facilitate the process to get the equipment demobed – some was preceding the transition plans, some was while the transition plans were being signed. We would sometimes need to vary from the transition plans based on where the response was at that level.
- Many of the LNOs were reservists, had 60 day deployment timeframes, but many agreed to stay under voluntary program, to help with continuity.
- LNOs were the easiest person for the local elected officials to reach, and then they would go back through the response organization to get the needed information.

What was the process for VOOs? VOO demob? Who was involved?

- There were more people that wanted to be involved in the VOO program. We had to work on an equal process for vessel rotation.
- We wanted to get a handle on the list; some people were on the VOO lists that were from outside states.
- CG portion was to identify the tasks, and capabilities needed to complete – and then there were different processes to get the particular VOOs resourced to meet the requirements.
- Ownership of the VOO program was at the county/parish level.

What was the role of LNOs in transition plan and demob?

- CAPT Ellis' first day was the second Parish President meeting where there was the decision to have the 7-day freeze of assets, nothing would demob 7 days. It was then that we decided to develop Parish plans to be a supplement/annex to the LA Transition Plan.
- Parishes were in attendance, some more involved than others.
- LNOs were engaged in that process.
- Demob of any assets during that period, such as the Navy skimmers and boom, we had to get special permission to get them released, decon'd and sent back to Gulfport during the 7 day hold.
- Our biggest concern was getting away from date triggers to contingency triggers.
- Parishes signed off on plans, but there was review and changes at UAC, and they scheduled the 3rd Parish President meeting to review the changes and, get updated signatures and tie the Parish Transition Plans to the Louisiana Transition Plan.
- All parishes have signed off on the Transition Plans. If there are changes, need to go back to parishes for permission to demob things earlier.

Did you have LNOs with City Mayors, or just Parish/County as the lowest level?

- County LNOs would meet with Mayors if there was a need.

What do you think as the ideal qualification of a LNO?

- Were looking for senior officers, not rank, but people with maturity and experience. Knowledgeable about CG operations. As we progressed, we have gone down to Chief Petty Officers, those who may live in that area and serve as a LNO during a hurricane.
- The key thing is someone with good interpersonal relationship skills, an ability to pass factual and accurate information, communicate and represent the CG, and know the boundaries for what is outside our lane.
- If needed, we would call them and ask questions over the phone.

Is there any way to capture qualifications in the MRTT?

- All LNOs did a great job.
- We continue to do ICS certification. All LNOs have received ICS qualification signed off on during my time here. Hope that we can keep this information and track it to utilize these personnel for future LNO programs.
- We have tapped into known LNO certified personnel as LNOs for this event.
- Need to come up with common goals.

Branch Chiefs vs. LNOs – what did you do to select Branch Chiefs and train them?

- CAPT Ellis was not involved in that process. He assumed that they looked for operational background related to the task at hand, such as pollution prevention qualifications.

Was there an LNO training program before they were placed in the field? Were any pulled back?

- No, we did not.
- Some LNOs were dismissed by the Parish Presidents, so we had to find new ones to backfill.

Communications

- There was not much operational engagement. Did get involved in DOD and NG LNOs, would coordinate with them when it was needed. Most of the National Guard LNOs have demobed.
- When we stood up the Gulf Coast IMT, had a separate LNO program – these are considered operational LNOs, and they were to be used for specific operational issues.
- My team of LNOs is aligned with the UAC.

Were there any issues that you were aware of at the ICP with the LNOs? Did any try to take over?

- Not that CAPT Ellis was aware of.

Training

- Didn't have to have ICS training. Most had at least gone through 100, 200, 700, and 800, and some had gone through 300, a few even had 400 level.
- Since then there are some tailored ICS courses for particular positions, such as the Situation Unit Leader.
- There are PQS books for Level 3, but they don't have for the lower levels yet (Level 1 or 2).

EMSI just in time training or coaching opportunities?

- CAPT Ellis thought that training for LNOs is a good idea. Question is how to structure it?
- He would like to see cross-cultural communications. Sensitivity to the cross-cultural communications should be key, understanding of the interagency process, knowing the authorities and limitations, etc. Also public speaking, though they should have a foundation for that already.

Were LNOs ever used for operational decisions? To what extent did the LNO program try to get operational involvement from the locals?

- Yes. There were advantages of using the LNO over Branch Commander – ICS is focused on technical operations.
- LNOs could bring the human perceptions into things, and could help relate to the emotional perspective of the locals. Such as dealing with the MS counties who felt they were ignored or neglected by the Federal government during Katrina. The LNOs could take extra time to meet their needs better.
- A best practice is the emotional Intel quotient.

What was the berms issue?

- It initially came up around the permitting; they needed an emergency permit to be issued to do the berms in LA. With the well close to being declared officially dead, we were trying to identify if we still thought that there was an emergency condition to go through emergency permitting vs. regular permitting process. If situation was no longer an emergency, then USACE would have to go through the normal claims process and BP would not have to foot the bill.
- We asked BP on their status/opinion, would they support based on what they had promised LA or redirect the funds elsewhere. We also needed to check with the lawyers and continued to coordinate with USACE.
- Once an emergency permit is signed, it is good for the entire berming process, but LA would have to go through the normal process for any additional berms.
- At that time, RADM Zukunft did not want to declare that we were out of the emergency period.
- We also realized it was not an issue per USACE, so no letter from RADM Zukunft was needed.
- Information was provided to the LA Governor's office and BP to decide to continue with the berms or use the money elsewhere.

Did you find much confusion at the Parish level on a Stafford Action vs. National Contingency Plan response?

- They had no confusion; they were firm that it was a Stafford Act.
- Under LA law, when an emergency declaration is made, the ability to designate state and local resources is designated down to the parish level. This is not the case under an NCP/OPA90 response.
- We have not made it a point to argue this, but there is a confusion factor.
- It may have added to the confusion as the LA Governor did sign the emergency declaration – but there was a specific comment that it was under OPA90 and not a Stafford Act included in the emergency declaration.
- Don't know if the Parishes knew and ignored or just didn't understand the nuances.

Best Practice

- People in the field at the tactical level the ICS structure and people who came together was a successes – they worked together, coordinated, communicated.

Area for Improvement and Recommendation

- External communications piece is where we lost some of it. Getting things out there; we pushed lots of data out there, but it wasn't packaged in a way to full explain what it meant. We took 50,000 samples, but what does that mean? Information was not packaged well to tell the story.
- Various agency websites posting information also caused confusion on who was in control. Should have had all information on 1 deepwater horizon website, with links to agency websites.
- VOO program needs to be codified in the policies and procedures.
- Need to make sure you are communicating through multiple levels/avenues, from the start of the spill.