



*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

Interviewees: **Captain Joann Frances Spangenberg,  
USCGR**  
Harbor Defense Command Unit 201  
&  
**Senior Chief Petty Officer Bradley Blatchley, USCGR**  
HDCU 201

Interviewer: PAC Peter Capelotti, USCGR  
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Place: Naval Station Newport, Rhode Island

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**Q:** You're both Coast Guard Reservists?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Right.

**SCPO Blatchley:** Yes.

**Q:** And how long have you been in the Reserve?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Well I've been in the Coast Guard Reserve since '85, so 16 years.

**Q:** Were you on active duty before that?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** I was active duty in the Coast Guard eight years, Air Force enlisted four-and-half years, Air Force active duty two years, so I have over 31 years.

**Q:** Oh really, wow! Then you came into the Coast Guard as what?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** I came in the Coast Guard through OCS. I was commissioned in '77.

**Q:** Right. Senior Chief?

**SCPO Blatchley:** I'll have 20 years in October; all Reserve.

**Q:** Were you at a port security unit before this?

**SCPO Blatchley:** No, I was actually out at Group Long Island Sound in New Haven for 17 years and just came here about two-and-a-half years ago. I did MSO [Marine Safety Office] work there and was on the small boats as a crewmen and boarding officer for about nine years until I came here.

**Q:** And where are we? Where is here? When was this unit stood up?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** There was a change. I want to say it was in 1995 that it was stood up.

**SCPO Blatchley:** I believe that's correct.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** It was actually a change from the . . . how did they do it? It was Inshore Undersea Warfare Group. It was in Boston before it came here to Newport and there was some reorganization within the Navy structure as to who we reported too, which really was the crux of the change. That happened in '95 and then we changed again; the reorganization of the Navy structure of who we reported too, back in, I want to say it was late '98 / early '99.

**Q:** And this is a combined Navy Reserve/Coast Guard Reserve unit?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** It's a Navy commissioned unit; joint with the Coast Guard and the Navy. There's a Memorandum of Agreement between the Coast Guard and the Navy that for the five Harbor Defense Commands on this coast, two of them are headed by Coast Guard captains and the other three are Navy.

**Q:** Okay, as part of that memorandum?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Right. So that was the agreement; we had two and the Navy had three.

**Q:** And all of these units are staffed jointly between Coast Guard and Navy?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Correct. The Harbor Defense Commands for all the Naval Coastal Warfare units are the only ones that are joint commands.

**Q:** Right.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** The Mobile Inshore Undersea Warfare Unit [ MIUW ] that does surveillance and the Inshore Boat Unit [IBU] that is comparable to the Port Security units, those are all Navy.

**Q:** Right.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** So we're the only one that's a joint command.

**Q:** And you said there are five on the East Coast?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Correct.

**Q:** And how many units are there total?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** There are 23 units on this coast; combined HDCs, MIUWs and IBUs.

**Q:** Oh I see, uh huh, and you're called?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** The Naval Coastal Warfare; the entire community.

**Q:** Okay, of those three units put together?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Yes, and that consists of all those three.

**Q:** And what does your element do; the Harbor Defense?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** We're a command and control element.

**Q:** Right.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Actually C4I; Command, Control, Computers and Intel.

**Q:** Let's say you coordinate activities with the MIUW units and the IBU warfare people.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** The idea is that if we were deployed somewhere we go as a package; an HDC, a MIUW or two, an IBU or two, with the idea that we would provide the command and control. The MIUW does the surveillance and the Inshore-Boat Units do the interdiction, so we can go anywhere. Originally the idea was to go overseas to provide waterside protection.

**Q:** Right.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** We report to Naval Coastal Warfare Group Two in Williamsburg, Virginia. So from the group on down is the entire Naval Coastal Warfare community.

**Q:** And how long have you been with this unit?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** I've been the Commanding Officer since October of 2000.

**Q:** Okay, and before that?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Before that I was down at Naval Coastal Warfare Group Two as the N5; the Planning Officer.

**Q:** Okay, and when did you start working in a sort of joint way with the Navy?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** That was in February of 2000.

**Q:** As N5 Chief, Planning Division, yes.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** So I've only been in the joint world since February of 2000.

**Q:** Right. Senior Chief, how about you?

**SCPO Blatchley:** I've been right here for about two-and-a-half years.

**Q:** Right, working with HDC?

**SCPO Blatchley:** Yes.

**Q:** Right, and you came here from?

**SCPO Blatchley:** New Haven.

**Q:** Right. You've mobilized as a unit before to do training exercises, is that right?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** We've done . . . well they don't really call it mobilize, but we've done annual training (AT) for two-week periods. They've done - before I got here - a time in Egypt for an exercise and one in Turkey. The unit, back in '95, had been mobilized for Haiti, so that was the last full mobilization for this unit prior to this one.

**Q:** Does command and control include any linguists or linguists in training for these places? How much interdiction do you have with the places that you train in?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Generally what happens when we go – and for this particular evolution we were supposed to be going to the Med - we would have linguists provided to the unit. We would try to have at least one. Where we were going; Spain, we would have at least one Spanish speaking person on at least one or more of the boats.

**Q:** Right.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** And then ideally one in the Communications Center so that we could communicate freely. I have a Spanish speaking person in this unit right now, which we used a lot when we were down in Puerto Rico last year doing the Vieques Island; supporting the range operations down there. And actually no, I'm sorry. I have two people that speak Spanish and one was over with us in Rota and was very useful in speaking with the locals.

**Q:** Yes. Is this the first time that you've been mobilized?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** I was mobilized for Haiti but I was down in MLC [ Maintenance and Logistics Command ] in Governor's Island.

**Q:** Yes, but as a whole command?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Since the reorganization, yes. But in '95 they had people in Haiti; down there in Haiti actually.

**Q:** Right. Have you been mobilized before during your career; your Reserve career?

**SCPO Blatchley:** Just for a brief time during the Perfect Storm. We had to take the boats into a safe harbor and stay with them until it was over. It was over a very short period. So this is my first real full mobilization.

**Q:** Yes, and you guys were called up when?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** November 18th, 2001.

**Q:** And what were you called up to do?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** We were called to do Homeland defense.

**Q:** Where?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Actually up into the northeast area. Within this building we have one MIUW and us, and the idea was we would be a whole force package and we could take care of things from one port to another, kind of a "sneaker-net" kind of thing. We jump from port to port to provide force protection wherever it was needed. That apparently never came about. There was some discussion, I guess, Group Two; our boss, thought that the Coast Guard wanted us to do this but the Coast Guard never came out with ports for us to do it. So that mission looked like it wasn't going to happen, and then CINCUSNAVEUR [ Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Navy in Europe ] came and said, look, I need the same composition to go do work over in the Med, and so we were supposed to be in the Med in the middle of January. Well we're still here.

**Q:** And you'd be doing force protection and anti-terrorism?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Force protection, anti-terrorism, waterside protection; basically anything we can to provide protection to the gray hulls.

**Q:** So when you do force protection - let's say you were doing it - had you been mobilized in November/December to do it here in the U.S., you would have been essentially protecting Navy assets in different ports or can you provide protection to an entire port?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Well the idea was that we would actually work for the Coast Guard providing protection wherever they wanted it.

**Q:** Right.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Now you know when I was up in District right after September 11th there was a lot of discussions of overextending the resources and surveillance and trying to keep track of vessels as they came into the ports. That's really the kind of thing we can do. We can do . . . the MIUW units have radar so we can do surveillance of what's coming in and out of the port; keep track of that. The boats certainly can provide protection of what we call High Value Assets; the ships coming in, and Boston's a perfect example. You have an LNG [ Liquefied Natural Gas ] ship coming in. We could have the boats escorting that ship all the way in and the whole time she's in offloading her product. Just what the Port Security unit basically did right after September 11th. We can do the same kind of thing but we provide the surveillance and then the command and control element on top of it.

**Q:** You report to a Navy command?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Correct.

**Q:** Who's your nearest liaison in, say, the First Coast Guard District?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** There isn't any because we actually report to [Atlantic or LANT] Area.

**Q:** Okay.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** It goes from the Navy through to MARDEZ [Maritime Defense Zone] to LANT Area.

**Q:** Okay. So your nearest Coast Guard person would be the Atlantic Area Commander?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Yes.

**Q:** Yes. So if you were going to get tasking - I'm just trying to figure out the flow chart here – if First District wanted you they'd then have to go to LANT Area and ask for you and they would ask the Navy?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Right, and in fact that's exactly what happened when I was up in District. They had sent a message to the Navy saying, we would like these boats, these vessels, this surveillance equipment, and they identified what they would like and then it filters on Area to Amphibious Group Two to Naval Coastal Warfare Group Two.

**Q:** I know when I talked to [ the Commander of the First Coast Guard District, Rear ] Admiral [ George ] Nacarra yesterday he said, the case was that one of the first things they did is each District tried to define where their security zones were going to be and what they were they were going to call them, and how they were going to set up commands for them. And in the 1st District he had told his folks that he needed a tiered; three-tiered system of what our most vulnerable spots are. Any of the ones we really need to secure are going to be called Tier One Assets, and so he sent that out to all his Captain of the Ports and so forth and got this list back.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Right, a huge list. Everything was Tier One.

**Q:** Everything was Tier One (laughter). So that meant you had to go back out to the field.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** We had to keep trying to whittle it down.

**Q:** Yes. In other words everything's strategic and we've got to guard it all the time. So that clearly was . . . and I think it may simply be a case of when they realized how much we have to guard they just said, we can't do it.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** That right, lots of painful discussions on that. The first Tier One list . . . because it was horrendous.

**Q:** Yes.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** And if you go back to the original war plans that we used to have there, there were lists of ports identified as critical assets and they were very few and very far between, because early on in the planning stage the Coast Guard had gone through this and realized that they could not possibly protect everything with the resources they had.

**Q:** Not with a half a million people.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Right.

**Q:** So you were called up on Title 10 for a year, is that right?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Well originally I was called up under Title 14 to go do 30-days up in Boston. Then they changed it to Title 10.

**Q:** Right, and what were you going to be doing in Boston?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Working on the planning cell up there at District "O" [ Operations ]. Then they changed it to Title 10. The reason there was some consternation there was because under this Mob Order you cannot pull people out of a deployable unit independently.

**Q:** Ah, okay.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** If the unit looked like it was going to be deployed you couldn't take individuals out. So here they were calling for me to go up there and I said, look, if the unit's deployed I have to go back with the unit. So that was the agreement we had made and so I think it's going to end up that my first 30-days will be under 14 USC.

**Q:** So you did 30 days in Boston?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** I did 30-days. It looked like the unit was getting called up. I said, I need to go home and get some things done at work before the unit's called up because that will be for a full year.

**Q:** What do you do in civilian life?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** I work for the Navy. I'm Head of the Environmental Safety and Security Department at the Naval Undersea Warfare Center [ NUWC ] here in Newport.

**Q:** And how about you Senior Chief?

**SCPO Blatchley:** I'm a police officer in Connecticut.

**Q:** Where?

**SCPO Blatchley:** In a town in Connecticut; Southington.

**Q:** Uh huh. And how long have you been there?

**SCPO Blatchley:** I've been there almost 18 years.

**Q:** What kind of challenges has this presented for you, mobilizing for the first time?

**SCPO Blatchley:** Well the big challenge is my wife is due in about three weeks.

**Q:** Oh, congratulations. I'm glad mine's not. (Laughter)

**SCPO Blatchley:** So that's number one on the list. But that's working out okay because I usually get home on the weekends to be with her.

**Q:** This isn't your first one is it?

**SCPO Blatchley:** It is.

**Q:** Oh it is?

**SCPO Blatchley:** It is, believe it or not.

**Q:** Got a little tired relations? (Laughter)

**SCPO Blatchley:** Yes.

**Q:** What have you been doing all this time?

**SCPO Blatchley:** They said good things come to those who wait. (Laughter) So I figured this will be really good.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** This is going to be twins.

**Q:** Yes, at least.

**SCPO Blatchley:** I'm not that good. As far as work, it really worked out well. I had a lot of cooperation from my employer and tons of support from my friends at work and fellow workers. They're making up my difference in pay. They're continuing my insurance. They're taking care of my wife; making sure that she has everything she needs, and support also. So although it has been a hardship as far as being away from her, otherwise it has really been a very comfortable move.

**Q:** I'm wondering if just the nature of what happened on September 11th has - especially with the fire and the police and the way that things happened in New York - if that's made it easier for Reservists, especially Reservists in the old Port Security Units?

**SCPO Blatchley:** Absolutely, it absolutely did. My police chief who had just retired, I had a lot of problems with through the years with drilling; some major league problems, and I wasn't going to give it up just because he didn't like it, because I figured I'd outlast him, which he retired March 2nd. So that's the case. But when he had to cut me loose for this he was absolutely 100 percent cooperative. I think because he knew he was retiring anyway, plus he didn't want any bad ink at all.

**Q:** Right.

**SCPO Blatchley:** And so he just went with the flow and it worked out really well for me.

**Q:** Well you must not have any problems at all since you're so wired into this.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Well you'd think that but that's not necessarily true.

**Q:** Really?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Because NUWC is primarily a civilian organization and we're also what they call a Navy Working Capital Fund. We live off the money we bring in to do research. We don't get appropriated funding, so we have to be efficient. We have to earn our money. And so me being gone means that they have to bring in somebody to do my job, which means a different expense because they're still paying my military leave and all that.

**Q:** Sure.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** But the last time when I was called up for Haiti, when I got back home, I kept hearing, when are you going to be done with this? So even though it's the Navy . . . I mean and the captain I work for, I ran into him in the "O" club and he said, you know this is a real inconvenience to me. I was like, you know, not as much as the poor guy who's doing my job and his too.

**Q:** Or to you personally.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** So you'd think that the Navy . . .

**Q:** It's not real convenient to a nine year old to not have his mom at home.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Well I don't have to worry about any family. I don't have anybody at home to worry about, so it's easy for me to be mobile. But what I do find is for the folks at work. And you know as a manager, every time somebody would go out for a few months to have a baby, people double up. Well people have been doubling up to cover what I used to do and that's a hardship. I see the poor guy who's doing my job and he looks pretty tired and pretty frazzled if you ask me.

**Q:** Where were you on 9/11? Were you at work?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** I was at work, and in fact my physical security guy called me up and said, there's an accident or something; somebody hit the World Trade Center with a plane. So I had the folks turn on the TV, and I no sooner stood in front of the TV and saw the second one, and I said, that's no accident. So I said, I'm going over to Security because I knew that everything was going to hit the fan at that point. And sure enough, by the time I got from my building across the street to the security building then the Pentagon got hit and it just kept escalating. So from there we did the lock down and we got people home, and so it was a pretty chaotic day the first day.

**Q:** And how about you?

**SCPO Blatchley:** I was working on patrol and I stopped at home in the morning for a bathroom break actually and checked my e-mail, and I got an instant message from a guy who's the assistant fire chief in town. He says, go turn the TV on. He goes, a plane just hit the World Trade Center. And I remember he quoted "pretty impressive" he wrote. So I went down and I was watching it and thought to myself, my God, that is impressive looking. You know it looked like something more than just a Cessna. And at that time is when the second plane hit and they didn't know what happened. They thought it was an explosion. Then they played it back and they were saying, my God, there goes another plane; a jet, and when I saw it was a jet, right then I knew something was up, because it's too coincidental to have two planes hit.

**Q:** Yes.

**SCPO Blatchley:** And then back to work. We have capabilities of talking back and forth between the cruisers in town on our laptops in the car and the computers were just going wild because we were keeping track of what was going on.

**Q:** Really?

**SCPO Blatchley:** And then the Pentagon got hit and there were rumors that the State Department, there was a bomb. It was almost surreal being out there because you're just wondering, you know, wow, this is incredible. I mean, what's going to happen next?

**Q:** A Homeland security nightmare.

**SCPO Blatchley:** It was, like I said, it was almost surreal. It was like, wow, what's going to happen now? You know they really hit us and they hit us hard, and when's it going to stop?

**Q:** You folks train to guard inshore areas. How has it affected you that all of a sudden we've been . . . I know from the time we were at MSO Providence Port Security, it was the backwater of the Coast Guard and now all of a sudden it's . . . you look at the spikes in port security after 9/11 with the Coast Guard.

They went from cutters doing, I think, six hours of port security on September 10th to almost a thousand hours the next day.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Right.

**Q:** Everybody's focused on it now. How has that changed life for you?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Actually not much for us, because again, we work for this Navy chain and the Navy is always . . . for the last few years, well actually since the [ USS ] *Cole* [ DDG-67 ], Force Protection has been on every commanding officer's lips since that incident and certainly all the CINCs because of the concern to protect the gray hulls. So Force Protection has been growing along with our training, and what we've been doing has pretty much been growing gradually along with that concern. When September 11th hit I guess we all kind of expected something like this and it really wasn't surprising other than the fact it was in the United States and not overseas, and we expected the next incident to happen overseas. So our level of training and what we have probably done better since September 11th is get more money funding for the equipment we need and for some of the training that we weren't getting. So if anything, the biggest change I've seen is additional funding and additional training days available to do the job.

**Q:** What are your top training priorities?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Well, I mean my top training priority is we have this Mobile Ashore Support Terminal for a communication suite and we had very little training on that equipment prior to September 11th and prior to being mobilized, because it's a very technical piece of equipment. It's very hard to operate. Troubleshooting it, you really have to be an electronics engineer to troubleshoot it. You're talking satellites; very, very high tech. So we've had little training on that until we were mobilized.

**Q:** Right.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Now the folks can keep the thing running and troubleshoot it. They've learned all the little tricks. They've had SPAWAR; Space and Naval Warfare Command, who designed the equipment, up here many times helping them and teaching them. So my priority is to get that MAST up and running, because if we can't do that we can't do command and control.

**Q:** Right. How has it been, as Reservists, working with . . . equally split between Navy and Coast Guard? How are the ranks split? Do you have sort of an equal number of officers and equal number of enlisted? How does that work?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** We have a unit of 50 people. Seventeen of them are Coast Guard, the rest are Navy. And out of that 50, 29 now are enlisted and 21 are officers. So we're officer top heavy in my opinion. But as far as the mix, we don't do an us or them, other than our joking back and forth to each other. But the Navy folks are expected to learn the Coast Guard system and vice versa. I mean my admin folks don't tell me I don't do Navy. They do both, and that goes throughout all the departments, and because of that . . .

**Q:** Well if they can figure out both of those systems then that's really worth a medal.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Well, but you know what we found is we can sometimes leverage the systems against each other. Certainly when I'm looking for funding I sometimes can go through the Coast Guard system to get some things that I can't get from the Navy system. So it does have its benefits if you understand the two systems.

**Q:** Are you the senior enlisted person here?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Well now that he's been promoted as of this month, yes.

**SCPO Blatchley:** As of three days ago.

**Q:** Are you now going to become the equivalent of the Command Enlisted Advisor?

**SCPO Blatchley:** I believe so.

**Q:** Yes. You have to learn two Services as well. How have you been able to do that and sort through, you know, sort of Service-specific problems?

**SCPO Blatchley:** Well I get a lot of cooperation from the enlisted ranks. Everybody here gets along fabulously, especially from what I've seen at other units that are real strictly Navy and so forth. We've got a really, really good thing going here.

**Q:** Right.

**SCPO Blatchley:** And the people know that, being if I have a question or a problem that's Navy specific and I don't know anything about it, they're right up to getting it for me; getting the answers and helping out. So it's really not been a problem at all.

**Q:** Yes. Do you run into any surprise looks among Coast Guard people when you're out among other forces that wonder what you're doing?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Probably yes.

**Q:** Why are you wearing those uniforms?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Yes.

**SCPO Blatchley:** Yes, everywhere we go.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** We were laughing when I was over in Rota. We would walk into the mess hall and very few people would salute me because they just . . . first of all they didn't see the eagle. It kind of looks like a third class petty officer I guess. And then when they see the Coast Guard its like, what's the Coast Guard doing here? I mean they were very amazed that the Coast Guard would be over in Rota as part of a Naval Coastal Warfare Unit. So yes, we do get some interesting looks.

**Q:** Well I tried to leverage my Captain's command of the LORAN [ Long Range Aids to Navigation ] Station at Lampadusa in the mid-Eighties to let me follow you guys over there but that didn't work.

**SCPO Blatchley:** On the other hand I get saluted all the time.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Yes, they all understand that!

**Q:** Because they see the star.

**SCPO Blatchley:** Well they see the two colors, not even the star because I didn't have that. But I just came back from overseas and the base I just came from I was the only Coast Guard person that they probably had ever seen there. And first of all they didn't know what it was so they just saluted automatically, and then when they saw Coast Guard they'd always stop and say, what are you doing here?

**Q:** Maybe you were in the Spanish Coast Guard?

**SCPO Blatchley:** Yes, so I had a lot of explaining to do to a lot of people.

**Q:** So you're getting ready to head overseas now, is that right?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Well we're still planning for participation in Dynamic Mix; which is a NATO exercise.

**Q:** And you'll be doing Force Protection during that exercise?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** We'll be doing actual real live Force Protection during that. There are a lot of issues around the whole thing. But yes, we're tasked right now for two months to be overseas helping with the offload and providing protection during the offload of the Marine equipment from the ships.

**Q:** Is it you or the CO who would authorize a live firing in a situation like that, or how is the command structure set up when you have a threat?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Well we'd be working under CINCUSNAVEUR's Rules of Engagement, which are set up with the host nation where we'd be working. So it's a very painful process as far as who makes that decision.

**Q:** Right.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** And quite frankly that's why we haven't been over there earlier, because they don't have an agreement with the Spanish or the Italian governments to allow us to bring weapons into their port because there's a big concern; when do you shoot?

**Q:** Right.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Unlike when we were in Southwest Asia the agreements were worked out. It was very clearly defined that if the ship was warned away and kept coming they set themselves up to be shot at.

**Q:** Right.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Well in these countries over in the Med they don't go for that. It's like they want a little bit more warning than once.

**Q:** Right.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** So that's been part of the problem. And oddly enough, one of the recent concerns were that the Spanish government was somewhat correlating us with SEALS. It's like, oh please, don't do that. (Laughter) It's the word defensive. We're not offensive. We're here to protect the ships and not really go after them. But a lot of people don't really understand what we do.

**Q:** Do you have issues like that in the United States?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Yes.

**Q:** I mean especially with *Posse Comitatus* and the joint command and all of that?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Well that was a big concern when we went down to Vieques, because we're the nearest Coast Guard to the Navy unit and we're going down to provide waterside protection against U.S. citizens.

**Q:** Right.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** So initially when the Coast Guard had gone down there they didn't want any of the Coast Guard people from the cutters, or actually Coasties in Coastie units, touching the soil down there because they were concerned about that because it would be viewed as the Coast Guard is going down there to arrest Puerto Ricans, which was not the case. So there was some concern when we were going down as part of Naval Coastal Warfare. It's like, Coast Guard, you can't touch land. I said, well wait a minute. I work for the Navy I'm not going down there with my Coast Guard law enforcement authority. I'm going down as a Navy unit to do Force Protection. So there was some discussion about what we could and couldn't do, and some confusion, because the Coast Guard side and the Navy side, they really don't understand Naval Coastal Warfare.

**Q:** Yes, and the other side of that coin is . . . what I'm hearing a lot is, that after 9/11 the importance of having white hulls in ports as opposed to gray hulls because they have this reassuring image without being sort of overly military, that the gray hulls don't. And although I've heard a lot of admirals say that any military that would have been around in those first few days would have been more than welcome.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** You know we had lots of discussions in Boston about weapons on the boats, but it was very interesting that they weren't intimidated by the Port Security Units. You know they're gray hulls and they had weapons, but people actually felt comfort by their presence then.

**Q:** Yes.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Now I don't know that it would be like that now; today. Maybe not quite as comfortable because...

**Q:** Well I think it's a problem within the Coast Guard as well because the Coast Guard has never sorted out the military image it wants to present.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Right.

**Q:** I mean I think it's fairly comfortable in its civilian law enforcement image and its life saving image certainly. But there's this whole . . .you've got a lot of people that join the Coast Guard to sort of save dolphins and what not and didn't expect to be shooting drug runners in the Caribbean. Then when they find out that they're doing that they have a little bit of an identity crisis. Do you have some of those same things as Reservists, being in the Coast Guard Reserve, sort of under one model and now you're a joint unit with entirely different requirements?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** I think a lot of people, if they don't know anything about the unit, yes. When I left Activities New York to go into Naval Coastal Warfare I was accused of becoming a snake eater just because they didn't understand; why would you want to do that? Why would you want to wear that uniform and sleep out in tents? Well I think that once people are exposed to it and they see that we're a defense posture. We're not out there beating the hills. We're defensive. It really is the same thing that the Coast Guard does. It's just that we're wearing funny looking uniforms and we do it generally overseas. But it's really no different than . . . I'll go back to my Marine Safety Office days in the Eighties, well actually the late Seventies. We did harbor patrol. We did protection. We kept track of what was coming and going on in the port. We'd go out and do harbor patrols on a regular basis. We could do the same kind of thing now. Basically we're the eyes of what's coming and going. If there's a Navy ship that we're trying to protect, we're keeping track of what's coming around it, and if necessary, then we would shoot to protect it.

**Q:** Yes.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** But it's really not that much different.

**Q:** Right.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** What really makes us unique is most people just don't understand what we do.

**Q:** Yes. Do you have a strategy for dealing with that? Do you have a PAO [ Public Affairs Officer ]? Who handles your public affairs?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** When I came onboard that was one of the things I said to the folks we need to do a better job of, because people didn't understand us. And I know Ron was talking to you and we had several others, and we were thinking about getting an article in the Reservist. Because I've seen a lot of Port Security Unit articles but not much on the Harbor Defense Command [ HDC ], and a lot of people would see those billets on the list and go, well what is an HDC and what do they do?

**Q:** Right.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** So we were trying to get some information in the Reservist just so people could get an idea. We wanted to get somebody to go down with us in Vieques but that was not really kind of our normal operation.

**Q:** Right.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** If we had been deployed here that would have been an ideal opportunity for people to say, okay, here's what an HDC does and here's how they do it. We really need to do some of that, because everybody knows PSUs.

**Q:** Has there been any discussions about either future exercises; AT exercises, or mobilization to specific events?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Well if we definitely do Dynamic Mix I think there's an opportunity to do something there, because then we will be camping out. We will have, hopefully, the full suite of equipment from the boats on down.

**Q:** Right.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** There's an ideal opportunity really. It's a NATO exercise but we're providing real live Force Protection. So we're not just participating in an exercise, which up until recently was all the unit's been doing.

**Q:** I'll stay in touch with Ron every so often anyway, but make sure you let me know, because I'll definitely pass the word to our media folks that they do something about that, because that would be more of a national story that our media folks at Headquarters should be able to field CNN and get one of their reporters over there to do something.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Because, again, we'll be in a Spanish port. We're not on a military base. We'll be in Spanish waters providing protection for a Military Prepositioning Ship for Marine equipment that's going inland to Spain. So it's not only a multi-nation, but multi-military operation.

**Q:** Right.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** We'll be dealing with Spanish military, so that's a really good discussion there.

**Q:** Oh absolutely. The Marines actually will be chopping to the Spaniards.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** So it's kind of an interesting twist and it's the first time Spain has ever participated in a NATO exercise.

**Q:** Really?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Yes, which is probably why we have some of the problems we're having?

**Q:** Yes, exactly. I know Mike mentioned when we had a Reserve unit . . . and I don't know if this is what you found, is that you have . . . they're ranks are kind of immaterial in the sense that you have a lot of people that bring skills from their civilian life. Did you find that same thing pertains here?

**SCPO Blatchley:** Yep, definitely.

**Q:** What's the mix of your enlisted people between, say, Navy and Coast Guard?

**SCPO Blatchley:** Do you know what the numbers are there?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** It's probably about 75 percent to 25 for Navy enlisted to Coast Guard enlisted.

**Q:** Right.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** The range of talents that the enlisted folks bring . . . of course I being prior enlisted, I still like the enlisted. I say they're the rock of the whole organization. I can get rid my officers and still keep functioning.

**Q:** You know I heard an amazing . . . Vince Patton; the Master Chief of the Coast Guard, said that the Coast Guard Reserve has 52 enlisted Reservists with PhDs, and he said, that probably matches up in total numbers, not even relative numbers, with any other service.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** I have people; enlisted folks, that are experts in their civilian job on some of this technical equipment that we're dealing with to the point where we had one of our Petty Officers just got our SIPRNET account up through the phone lines and our MAST system. He is the first to do that and had he not only sat down and went through the whole account; an accreditation process for the account and then the configuration of the hardware - so he not only took care of the paperwork - but he did the configuration of the hardware and now he's doing the final establishment of the accounts. Nobody else has been able to do that since this unit had the equipment for now, what, at least five years.

**Q:** Yes.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** So he's the first. Another guy came with a lot of experience from SPAWAR [ Space and Naval Warfare ] and does this kind of work. He sets up networking on the outside. And these guys make big salaries on the outside.

**Q:** Sure.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** And they've come in here as E-5s and E-6s, and we wouldn't get some of the stuff done without them. So there's an interesting mix of people. We have policemen. We have paramedics.

**Q:** Are you scheduled to de-mob after the exercise?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Well right now they have us scheduled to de-mob. There's a lot of discussion going on because we've been sitting here. But if we don't participate in the exercise, they have us scheduled to de-mob in the end of June.

**Q:** Right.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Now [ the Commander of the Atlantic Maintenance and Logistics Command Rear ] Admiral [ James A. ] Kinghorn was up here last week and he's been talking to [ the Commander, Atlantic Area and Fifth Coast Guard District Vice ] Admiral [ Thad W. ] Allen to see if they can come up with some kind of job for us to do, possibly in Homeland Defense, which is where we originally started, just to keep us busy. Because it's a shame; there's a lot of talent here.

**Q:** Well it would be a shame to mobilize and then run through all the equipment and train for a future event.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Especially since the training now - in this unit - of all the HDCs, because the other thing in this coast: out of the five HDCs only two of them have MAST Units and we're obviously now at this same point in time with all of our active duty, the more experienced, even from the Group folks. They have a MAST Unit, but these guys can make that equipment work. They also run the Super High-Frequency Unit for Secure Comms. No one else can do that. So now we've gotten them all prepared and ready for training. It would be a shame not to utilize their expertise, because if they don't use it they'll lose it.

**SCPO Blatchley:** Correct me if I'm wrong, but when we went down to Virginia for our Port Security War College training, didn't our Comms people actually go down there and teach those folks down there what was going on and fix their equipment, and it was supposed to be the other way around?

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Yes, and the Commodore wasn't too wild when they told him that we fixed his equipment for him; we did a grooming of his equipment.

**Q:** Yes, Commodores don't like to hear that.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** No they don't, but he deserved it (laughter). And the other thing is if they de-mob us because there are still some concerns of what's going on out there, like the Vieques operations continuing. And right now they've got some of the units doing that under Annual Training. Well I said, don't de-mob us and expect us to do an Annual Training at the end of the summer.

**Q:** Right.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Because by the time we send these people home, their employers are not going to let them have anymore time off.

**Q:** Yes, not without somebody taking down another building somewhere.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Yes, well that's exactly right.

**Q:** And I think that a lot of opportunities were missed in those first six months thinking that patriotism was going to last forever.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Well it's kind of interesting. We were talking when we went down to Williamsburg; the flags that you could see everywhere. They were on people's trucks and their cars. I mean it was unbelievable. Well now I'm noticing they're disappearing or they're getting tattered.

**Q:** I noticed that in Washington, DC. You don't see very many cars with flags on them. You know the stickers are starting to fade. You know it the same thing with the Gulf War. It was the same, and then it fades.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Yep.

**Q:** You know the president who had a 95 percent approval rating lost the election two years later.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Yes, right. That's exactly right. We forget very quickly. And I think too - the whole thing with the Med - they were much more willing to talk right after September 11th, because time distances itself. The desire to bring us over and do force protection is less and less.

**Q:** Yes. As a matter of fact Admiral Allen said the same thing to me. He said, you know if they don't take this chance to get the "O" people to talk to the "M" people at long last in the Coast Guard, he said, we'll never get this chance again.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** Well you know I was a little bit disappointed when I was up in District because, sure enough, that argument was coming up; well who are they going to work for? You know, because we were talking about Force Protection people there. Well who are they going to work for? Well it makes sense "M"s got the statutory authority but "O" felt that they've got the resources.

**Q:** Right.

**CAPT Spangenberg:** I said, here we go; the same old argument.

**Q:** Yes. Well Admiral Nacarra yesterday said, and Allen as well, you know, they've got to co-locate the MSOs and the Captains of the Port and the Groups, and get the resources where the enforcement people are.

**END OF INTERVIEW**

