



United States Coast Guard
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U.S. Coast Guard Oral History Program

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

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

Interviewee: **Commander Robert W. Grabb, USCG**
Commanding Officer, PSU-305
Fort Eustis, Virginia

Interviewer: PAC Peter Capelotti, USCGR
Date of Interview: 22 May 2002
Place: On board *Gitmo Queen* at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba

Q: How long have you been in the Coast Guard Sir?

CDR Grabb: I've been in the Coast Guard 24 years.

Q: And do you have active duty time or is this all Reserve time?

CDR Grabb: Prior active duty; enlisted. I enlisted in the Coast Guard as an MST; a Marine Science Technician.

Q: Right.

CDR Grabb: Upon graduation from college back in 1972 I spent four years on active duty, both on the CGC *Ingham* (WHEC-35) and then at Marine Safety Office [MSO] Hampton Roads. At the time that I was an MST we were still doing Ocean Weather Stations. The CGC *Ingham* was doing Bravo, Charlie, Delta and Hotel ocean weather stations. We were still doing synoptic weather observations and BTs and XBTs, and all of that stuff.

Q: You probably know [Dr.] Dennis Noble [Ph.D.] who has written several books about the Coast Guard; a retired MST Senior Chief.

CDR Grabb: Right. But then I got off of active duty to pursue a graduate degree. Eventually I took a direct commission to come back in the Reserve program in March of '82 and I've been in the Reserve program since then.

Q: Well he told me . . . I had an e-mail from him last night. We're doing a presentation for Bill Wilkerson; a small boat historian, next week at MSO Philadelphia. He's Captain Adams; the Captain of the Port in Philadelphia, as the first . . . he was an enlisted MST. As far as Dennis knows the only MST to make captain. He got a commission.

CDR Grabb: I wasn't aware of that.

Q: You know its MST trivia. But you're probably right along with him as one or two of the only people to become senior officers from that rate, although I guess the rate's coming back now.

CDR Grabb: Well the rate seems to be more of a data processor rate than it used to be. We were closer, I think, to what the Navy calls an Aerographer's Mate. You know, back in the early Seventies.

Q: Right. Can you give me a sense of how you came to Port Security and how you came to this unit in particular?

CDR Grabb: Well we'll go back a little bit in history. The Coast Guard really had port security units [PSU] that were devised and came to being in the Desert Shield/Desert Storm area, and at the time they were what they called Notional Units; 301, 302, and I think it was 303. Those Reserve personnel were assigned to stations, groups, MSOs and once a year assembled as a port security unit. Well they were activated during Desert Shield/Desert Storm, and of course, given the rotation, they set up Camp Blanding in Florida, and a number of people were trained there for follow-on PSUs. I think what the Coast Guard realized then is that they had a certain expertise in the area of inshore protection that they could provide, and that the issue of the Notional PSUs really wasn't going to allow them to maintain that expertise and that level of training. So the Coast Guard then started to come up with active PSUs that were staffed primarily with Reservists.

Q: Uh hum.

CDR Grabb: There were initially three of them that were set up in '94: 305 at Fort Eustis, Virginia, 309 at Camp Perry, Ohio, which was the one that was the genesis when they took 301 and 302 and put them together, and 309 out in San Diego, California. When they commissioned 305 I was a plankowner and I came in as the Operations Officer.

Q: Okay.

CDR Grabb: So I started with the PSU program in October of '94. I spent two years as the Operations Officer, fleeted up, spent two years as the Executive Officer XO], and then in '98 when I made Commander, rotated to Atlantic Area; Operational Forces Branch, or AOFP, and spent two years on a staff tour there before coming back as the CO [Commanding Officer] of this unit in November of 2000.

Q: When you say a staff tour, you did a staff tour as a Reserve officer?

CDR Grabb: Yes, at Atlantic Area Operations.

Q: Could you explain that term; fleeted, what that means?

CDR Grabb: The port security unit has a commanding officer, that's a commander, and has two billets for O-4s. One is the executive officer and one is the operations officer. We deployed to Turkey to participate in Dynamic Mix '96, which was the second exercise from the moment that we had been stood up in October of '94. While we were over there the existing Executive Officer; Commander Paul Crissy, who is now Captain Crissy and the CO of PSU 307, was, after having made Captain, was rotated out of the XO slot.

Q: Yes.

CDR Grabb: Commander Heutberger at the time, who is now Captain Heutberger, retired, and works at Headquarters, selected me as the Executive Officer. So I went from Ops to XO, and the term is fleeting up to a position of greater responsibility in the command.

Q: Right.

CDR Grabb: That then meant that we had an opening for an operations officer and we moved what was a lieutenant commander-select, from the Boats Division, up, and it just allowed growth in the organization.

Q: Right. Do you remember where you were on the morning of September 11th?

CDR Grabb: Yes, I was actually over at Training Center Yorktown undergoing my five-year physical.

Q: You must have been . . . well no. He was at ICS [Integrated Support Command] Portsmouth. I guess [the Commander of the Atlantic Area (LANTAREA), Vice] Admiral [Thad] Allen was also getting his physical that day.

CDR Grabb: I was actually sitting in the Waiting Room at the Craik Clinic at Yorktown when it occurred, so I was performing Coast Guard duties. And of course the Craik Clinic is only several miles, or 15 minutes, from the unit in Fort Eustis. So after my physical was done I immediately reported to the unit that afternoon.

Q: So you were aware that morning that this was going to involve you folks?

CDR Grabb: One thing that we have become - and I say "we" meaning the unit and the personnel that are in Port Security or Naval Coastal Warfare - my people watch CNN and anytime there's harbor security, generally OCONUS [outside the continental U.S.] but anytime you're offloading men, material and equipment, harbor security, it tends to be the stock and trade for the PSUs.

Q: Yes.

CDR Grabb: And if all of a sudden something's happening in Somalia and people are going in, you know, it piques your interest and most people will check. And I will say that on 9/11, even before we got the recall, the people that were assigned to the unit were already calling in - we have a recall roster like everyone - calling in saying, hey, if you need me, I'm not at my home. Here's my number, I'm on a cell phone, etc.

Q: Right.

CDR Grabb: I'm someplace else checking in with the unit to make sure that the unit had the ability to get in touch with them. Because what we advertise is that within 96 hours of receiving the recall notice we can have everyone recalled, fully loaded, fully palletized, and have everything on the tarmac ready for air load and wheels up to be anywhere within the world. So that's a four-day period. And if you allow people three days to basically get in there you wouldn't get a lot of that done.

Q: Sure.

CDR Grabb: So if people pay attention to world events, if you will, and start to say, well what if? And if the unit gets recalled what do I need to do at home quickly to make sure that, you know, my wife has this in line and things of this nature.

Q: What do you do in civilian life Sir?

CDR Grabb: I actually work for the State of Virginia; the Virginia Marine Resources Commission is the agency. It's a State regulatory agency. We regulate the commercial and recreational fishing as well as

the environmental permitting, which is similar to the Army Corps of Engineers Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act and Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. Anyone who wants to build, dredge, bulkhead or put piers out, it requires an environmental permit from the State like they do the Federal Government. I am the Chief of the Habitat Management Branch, which oversees that environmental permitting program and I've been with the State of Virginia for 21 years.

Q: So you're a veteran of the marine environment, I guess, both in civilian life and in the military?

CDR Grabb: With the Marine Science Technician background, I went back, when I got off of active duty, and received a Masters in Biological Oceanography before I went to work with the State.

Q: Where did you do that?

CDR Grabb: Old Dominion University.

Q: Right.

CDR Grabb: And being with the State for 21 years and having been very fortunate in the Reserve billets that I've had, you know, have all been in either North Carolina or Hampton Roads. And yes, although I initially hail from western Pennsylvania, I would rather visit the mountains and live near the sea.

Q: And live at the ocean. I guess you probably have a desire at some point when you're in a new harbor like this to drop a line down over the side to see what's down there?

CDR Grabb: A fishing line more than anything.

Q: A fishing line, Right. Did you receive your tasking from LANTAREA, or a LANTAREA asset, is that right?

CDR Grabb: Yes, my operational commander is Commander Atlantic Area.

Q: Okay, so Vice Admiral Allen is your ultimate commander?

CDR Grabb: Right.

Q: And who do you have between you and Vice Admiral Allen, anyone? Do you have the Ops Officer? Where would an order come down from Vice Admiral Allen to the PSU?

CDR Grabb: Well it comes from Commander Atlantic Area. However, he has a staff; Captain [Larry L.] Mizell, who is the Atlantic Area Operations AO. Underneath him is Captain [James] Sabo, who is Atlantic AOF; Atlantic Area Operational Forces, and then the program that deals with the port security units and the LEDETs is AOFP, which is Atlantic Area Operational Force Protection. That's Commander [Thomas J.] Vitullo. But my operational commander is actually CAA.

Q: Sure.

CDR Grabb: My direct contact is obviously not with Vice Admiral Allen. It's with Commander Vitullo who's my "First Line" supervisor.

Q: How close is the relationship between the unit and LANTAREA? How high are you on their radar screen? You say you watch the news. They do also. Is it your sense that when something like this comes up that they're on the phone with you pretty quickly?

CDR Grabb: To begin with I think we have an excellent relationship with LANTAREA. Some of that by virtue of geography. Once LANTAREA moved from New York to Portsmouth and MLC [Coast Guard Maintenance and Logistics Command] moved from New York down to Norfolk . . . I'm located at Fort Eustis and I live in Virginia Beach.

Q: You're right in the middle of it.

CDR Grabb: So from a practical standpoint I drive past Area daily when I'm doing my civilian job and can swing in and can check on things. I have a STU cell phone and a STU at the unit. That's fairly close to my working location so I mean I have a close working relationship just by virtue of that proximity. You also have to keep in mind that Atlantic Area has four of the six PSUs and PAC Area has two. Also Commander Atlantic Area; Vice Admiral Allen, also is double-hatted as . . .

Q: District Commander, sure.

CDR Grabb: . . . 5th District Commander and MARDEZLANT (Maritime Defense Zone Atlantic).

Q: Right.

CDR Grabb: So that, since the PSUs are primarily . . . while they're a Coast Guard asset, unlike the Harbor Defense Command and the Naval Coastal Warfare Group, which are composites, our primary bread and butter if you will is Naval Coastal Warfare. From the standpoint of CINCLANTFLT [Commander in Chief, Atlantic Fleet] being in Norfolk and the MARDEZLANT hat that Vice Admiral Allen wears, and knowing that there is often considerable lead time from a planning perspective, yes, I think they will let us know. Not that, here's a Pre-warning Deployment Order, but where do you stand on readiness? How many people do you have? If you had to go someplace, what's the situation? And you can generally play those games, you know, the "what ifs."

Q: So I guess the point is, that you're not a sleepy little Reserve unit that they aren't aware of. They know exactly where you are and what your state of readiness is.

CDR Grabb: They do that. And again, by virtue of our location, if there's a CAPSTONE [a professional military educational program established by the National Defense University (NDU) for general and flag officer selectees] requirement, if there's a recruiting requirement or something in the area and if we have the personnel, we can participate. You're also highly visible just by virtue of how close you are.

Q: Sure. Did they at LANTAREA task you fairly quickly to saddle up and get to New York?

CDR Grabb: Actually yes. I received that call the evening of the 11th. I got the call at home on the evening of the 11th saying that they wanted us in New York. Activities New York had some expeditionary harbor protection that they wanted to do and how soon could we be there; the sooner the better.

Now the other thing was the reality; I did not have to air deploy. And you'll recall that a lot of the air infrastructure . . . all the military flights were flying but a lot of the civilian airspace was closed down, but we were still close enough that we were able to deploy by truck. We were able to tow four of our boats - four of the six, with what they call Prime Movers. I've got four of my own trucks - because from Fort Eustis to New York was only really about an eight-hour drive.

Q: Right.

CDR Grabb: We actually arrived. We got everyone onboard. I've got everything packed, palletized, trucks loaded, and got up there and basically arrived the evening of the 14th. So we beat our 96-hour requirement and were actually in New York and operational the following day.

Q: One of the things that surprised me in this whole project is – as essentially an outsider; somebody that had never had been on active duty – was how somebody on the “M” [Marine Safety] side of the Coast Guard; Captain of the Port for example, doesn’t have his own boats and has to liaison with the “O” [Operational] side to get across the harbor. Do you run into people . . . I’ve heard people refer to the Blue Coast Guard. Does the Blue Coast Guard have a word or a way of referring to you guys so when you show up in BDUs [Battle Dress Uniform] . . . are you the Green Coast Guard?

CDR Grabb: Well green as opposed to blue, that’s correct, in dealing with the white hulls; the 270s, 370s, 210s and 110s.

Q: Do you have to explain to them that you’re Coast Guard at all when you come up with these gray boats?

CDR Grabb: Not since 9/11. I think quite frankly, keeping in mind that this has primarily been a Reserve mission, even though I say that we have five active duty billets that are assigned to the Reserve unit.

Q: Are those officer billets?

CDR Grabb: I’ve got one O-3, which is my Logistics/Supply Officer. I’ve got a GM1 [Gunner’s Mate, First Class], an MK1 [Machinery Technician, First Class], an SK1 [Storekeeper, First Class] and a BM1 [Boatswain’s Mate, First Class], and they provide that core competency and that station keeper responsibility. Because as an active duty commissioned unit I have to maintain the same standards from the standpoint of reports as any other Coast Guard unit and it becomes extremely difficult to try and maintain those reporting standards if you’re only coming in one weekend a month.

Q: Sure.

CDR Grabb: And as well as the equipment, the supplies, and the amount of gear that we have. So we’re an active duty commissioned unit, but as I said, staffed primarily by Reservists. Now the Reserves also have a rate, which is a Port Security rate, which is not mirrored by the active duty.

Q: Right.

CDR Grabb: And prior to 9/11, quite frankly, I think the general perception was maybe it was an important mission but it’s obviously not that important, because if it was we’d have active duty PSUs and active duty PS’s at this point.

Q: Sure.

CDR Grabb: And as a result it was important, but it was below SAR [Search and Rescue] and ATON [Aids to Navigation] and “M”, and everything else.

Q: Sure.

CDR Grabb: I think, based on what the Commandant [Admiral James Loy] said immediately after 9/11, that while SAR was still the primary mission; Homeland Security i.e., Port Security was at the top of the list as well. And I think that visibility as to the active duty Coast Guard reinforced the fact that this is a Coast Guard mission. It’s not just a Reserve mission.

Q: Right.

CDR Grabb: And as a result - even in dealing with the 110s, 270s, and 378s as they’re coming in here to Guantanamo Bay and even in New York - the realization was there are certain things that we bring from the standpoint of training and weapons that you don’t get with a 41-foot UTB or you don’t get in a deployed area like this. And as the Navy found after the USS *Cole* [DDG-67], I think the commanding

officer of the ships that are coming in are very appreciative of the fact that, I've got another layer. I've got something that is providing an additional level of security in and around their vessel.

Q: What's your liaison like when a cutter or a Navy ship comes in? How are you tasked, to say, escort a vessel into a berth?

CDR Grabb: In this particular area there's what they call a Joint Operating Area [JOA], which was established for JTF-160, and that JOA stretches the entire southern boundary and out to three miles, even though there are Cuban territorial waters which stretch to the 12-mile limit. The Cuban Frontier Brigade Commander; General Hernandez Solar, now has acknowledged that basically the U.S. Naval Base Guantanamo Bay has an inherent authority and responsibility over that three-mile JOA. There's also what they call a Southern Boundary, which denotes - if you were back in the States - would denote as inland waters versus international waters.

Q: Sure.

CDR Grabb: Keeping in mind that by definition they're not inland waters - even though they're inland to Cuba, because we're not in the United States and there's not really a ColRegs line - they're all international waters. But that Southern Boundary, or what we call a Southern Boundary, in this particular harbor location is a line that's drawn from the leeward side of Guantanamo Naval Base to the windward side, which is the boundary of where the lighthouse is. To make a long story short, once the vessel provides a LOGREQ; a Notice of Arrival - what they require here - we, in working with the Navy, will know for instance that the Coast Guard Cutter *Bear* [WMEC-901] is due at 0900 and is going to go to a berth at the industrial area after she does some precision maneuvering or anchoring in the harbor.

Q: Sure.

CDR Grabb: We will pick her up and we will escort her in, much like we would any high value target in New York Harbor, from the Southern Boundary all the way into her berth, and what we essentially provide is that layered security zone around that moving high value asset. We would do the same thing for a Naval ship. We've got a DDG and an FFG that have been here since we arrived in mid-January. But by and large, I mean this Base; Guantanamo Bay, is used more by the Coast Guard. It's more of a Coast Guard Forward Operating Base than it is a Navy Base, because the Fleet Training Group is no longer situated here.

Q: That's one of the big surprises when I came down here, to see, it seems like a Coast Guard Base, not a Navy Base. It could be Coast Guard Base Guantanamo Bay.

CDR Grabb: There has been a time when there was actually a 378, a 270, a 210, a 110 and our boats, all in one area and they just happened to be here. The Coast Guard cutters are obviously involved in Migrant Interdiction Operations, and it does provide a place from which to sortie and return.

Q: Were you chopped to Activities New York? When you got to New York who did you work for?

CDR Grabb: [Rear] Admiral [Richard E.] Bennis [Commander, Activities New York/Captain of the Port, OCM].

Q: Okay. And so he or Captain Harris, or whoever the person there, would task you with a certain security zone or a certain asset to protect. How did that work?

CDR Grabb: Yes. Actually Admiral Bennis chopped us, if you will. I was working for Commander Mike McAllister who's the Operations Officer.

Q: Okay, I interviewed him when I was in New York, yes.

CDR Grabb: Right. They initially asked us to provide waterborne security over the OEM; Office of Emergency Management facility up near piers 91 and 94, and that's where the USNS *Comfort* [T-AH20] came in. So what we would do is we would provide a layered security around the USNS *Comfort* and those pier facilities that were being used for the recovery operations. After we were there a couple weeks they also decided that they wanted to have some additional, what would amount to, waterborne sort of riverine protection down in the Kill Van Kull's. That was primarily because that area was highly populated by facilities of, if not strategic, but just given the chemicals, the refineries and the things that are down there. So what we ended up doing, because we were augmented with two boats from the Coast Guard TRADET [Training Detachment], we were able to put a two-boat patrol in what they call the Kill Van Kull's and maintain a two-boat patrol up around the OEM facility; Piers 91 and 94 in the Hudson.

Q: What was the TRADET operating?

CDR Grabb: Shortly after we got there - initially they ordered both 305 and 307 to New York because 307 was headquartered in St. Petersburg - they arrived; their advance party, after we had arrived in New York. And as a result 307 was then detailed to continue onto the Port of Boston. So 307 was providing that security in Boston. A lot of that was related to the . . .

Q: The LNG [Liquified Natural Gas] tankers.

CDR Grabb: Well that and the cruise ships.

Q: Right.

CDR Grabb: They wanted to have them out of the New York Harbor. So 307 was up there. Coast Guard TRADET, which is at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, also provided a couple crews and two boats initially to assist Activities New York. So what happened when those crews and boats arrived was we essentially; 305, took control of those. So TRADET's two boats and crews chopped to me. So instead of having six boats and 12 crews I ended up with eight boats and 14 crews.

Q: Okay.

CDR Grabb: With that increased ability to field boats I was able to keep four boats underway 24/7 and was then able to split the coverage areas. Other than that my normal operation is three boats underway in a zone or layered defensive coverage. The remaining one boat is in what they call a Bravo Zero status. The other two boats are possibly in a Charlie or maintenance status.

Q: This TRADET is the folks you train with at Camp Lejeune when you're doing your stand ops and all, or stand training?

CDR Grabb: Yes, the CART/TUTA/FEP process. (Commanders Assessment of Readiness and Training; Tailored Unit Training Availability; Fleet Evaluation Problem).

TRADET was established after the first three PSUs. TRADET has been tasked with a number of other things in addition to working with the PSUs. They have done a lot with the Over-the-Horizon RHIBs [Rigid Hull Inflatable Boats]. They've done work with the DPBs [Deployable Pursuit Boats]. They're now doing a lot of training work with MSSTs [Maritime Safety and Security Teams] that are being stood up. But yes, primarily they provide that ability to centralize training to field what they call MTTs; or Mobile Training Teams, to go out to the units. They're also working very closely with the SOTG; Special Operations Training Group, which is what the Marines call their people down there in Courthouse Bay. And I think that's one of the primary reasons when the Second FSSG [Force Service Support Group], which was Brigadier General Leonard was initially sent down here and told to establish a detainment facility to accept incoming prisoners. And his first response, or question was, I've got the Marines. We can do that. We can secure it. What do I do for the waterborne? And I think, quite frankly, partly because of the close working relationship that we have with the Marines and the ability that he knows that we're actually

working right there at Lejeune, led him to say, yes, this is the kind of thing where I really need the Coast Guard's expertise.

Q: You're on his radar screen.

CDR Grabb: Yes, and it was great working with him.

Q: Yes. Let me go back to New York for a moment. Did the issue come up of the range of your guns in an enclosed space in New York Harbor?

CDR Grabb: The issue arose because of the realization that you had to provide that level of protection, but because you have, literally, facilities all around.

Q: Uh hum.

CDR Grabb: And there's really no area that you can fire where there may not be collateral damage.

Q: Sure.

CDR Grabb: I think - given the heightened risk and the perception that it might not have been the only terrorist incident, and keeping in mind that intel [Intelligence] at that time was saying that there were a lot of other things that were still being prosecuted in the general New York area - that that was a risk that the powers at be were willing to accept. But I think, yes, the reality is, and the reality goes to the person behind the weapon. You always want to minimize fratricide, or blue on blue, and to say that our people were extremely cognizant of the fact that if we do fire the weapons and miss the target, the rounds are going someplace. What normally we will do, whether it's this harbor or overseas in an area that's heavily populated with a host nation population, our primary mission is to basically interdict, to interpose ourselves between a potential threat and the high value asset. The *Comfort* had onboard what they call a Marine Corps Fast Company. The *Comfort*, as a large ship, is a much more stable platform, and generally if you're working with a facility you've got crew-served weapons that are actually on the shoreline.

Q: Sure.

CDR Grabb: What our boats do is we try to fend off the people. If they start to get past us, if there's evidence of a hostile threat - and quite frankly we clear the field of fire. Because what will then happen is before the threat . . . once we've cleared the field of fire and the threat continues on towards the high value asset - those shore based heavy weapons, which are much more stable, will be brought to bear as opposed to us bouncing around in the water.

Q: Sure.

CDR Grabb: So I think in reality we probably would have had to have had something that had blown by the 270s, was heading up the Hudson River, and was a known hostile target.

Q: So I imagine these procedures have gotten at least a reawakening or boost since the *Cole*, where you've now got bad guys who are willing to use things like otherwise innocuous looking water craft to carry out bombings?

CDR Grabb: The whole Naval Coastal Warfare [NCW] community has, subsequent to the *Cole*, reevaluated and re-examined what they call their TTP or their Tactics, Techniques and Procedures. There are new NCW documents that have been promulgated that are in draft form right now, NWP3-10.1, which sets forth a lot of the acknowledged and accepted techniques that are used in the harbor. And I think, yes, it's . . . the analogy normally is a lot like a cop on the beat. We're out there and it's really not covert. Our purpose is not to be like a radar cop tucked back in the median where we're waiting for

someone to come in and then we pounce on them from along the shoreline . . . and we have real small boats. We want to be overt. We want to be seen. We want to be that deterrent and we want to make people think about it.

Q: Make folks know you're there.

CDR Grabb: That's right. And it's like a cop driving in a patrol car . I mean even though he may not be in the exact position where someone's planning to do something. It's just the thought that he's there and could arrive is the deterrent. And quite frankly, General Leonard said it. "We want to project strength. We want the people to think about it. We want them to know that we're here, and the best case is we want them to go someplace else".

Q: Right. Well it's a good point. But I think the analogy is well taken between the cop on the beat and, say, the small boat station, which is generally regarded as sort of the firehouse. Something bad happens and the firemen rush out and rescue someone and then they come in, whereas the cop on the beat has to be out there more or less continuously.

CDR Grabb: And its 98-percent boredom punctuated by two percent of terror.

Q: Right.

CDR Grabb: And from our standpoint boredom is good.

Q: Does that sort of metaphorical difference translate into a cultural difference in terms of, say, a PSU or a Reserve unit augmenting a small boat station do you think?

CDR Grabb: I don't know whether it's a cultural difference. If you go back a number of years there used to be Reserve - and this is prior to Team Coast Guard and Full Integration - there used to be Reserve units with Reserve command structures.

Q: I was in one Sir; Reserve Unit MSO Providence. We were charged with guarding the Port of Providence.

CDR Grabb: Right. You would work closely with the active duty counterparts but you still had a Reserve structure to answer to.

Q: Oh yes, we had a whole Reserve unit administration, yes.

CDR Grabb: With full integration. The Reserve Force . . .

Q: They all went away.

CDR Grabb: They all went away, right. It's basically transparent with the exception of the 900 or so people that are in the PSU program. We're still organized much like the old Reserve units. We have a Reserve command structure. We don't really . . .we train each month for the mission.

Q: Right, you really are sort of the last of the classic Reserve units.

CDR Grabb: Yes.

Q: Or the first of what will be many new Reserve units.

CDR Grabb: Well that's absolutely true. They may go back to some of those units where you're training, not for an existing active duty mission, but for a potential mission.

Q: We lost a lot in the last ten years when that whole structure went away. We lost our training officers, admin [administration] and all the rest. And they sort of said, your career's on your own. You're on your own. And your esprit de corps goes . . . really your unit cohesion goes and all the rest. And now they're talking about . . . the latest figure I heard was 17,500 Reservists. They're going to have to have some kind of support structure for all those people.

CDR Grabb: And I think we are really . . . since I've been with this program, basically since '94, it is very comfortable for me. And, yes, it's just like the old Reserve unit structure.

Q: Sure.

CDR Grabb: And we are also not . . . I think the Coast Guard found subsequent to 9/11 when all of a sudden you have to start identifying where your Reserves are, the ones that are truly integrated into the stations or the groups or the MSOs, are somewhat transparent.

Q: Right.

CDR Grabb: Whereas with the PSUs I can actually scroll down a list or call up a roster and I can put my hands on 900 Reservists almost immediately, because I know where they are. The others are two here, five there, 20 over there, and it's a different organizational structure.

Q: It also gives you a different level of cohesion with the people that you work with I would think.

CDR Grabb: We have . . . you had mentioned the esprit de corps.

Q: Right.

CDR Grabb: I think, yes. It goes without saying that the people that are assigned here identify with the mission and feel that it's a valuable mission, and worthwhile, and definitely are proud to be affiliated with the PSU.

The other realization is that a lot of the people that we do have, by virtue of the mission, tend to be law enforcement officers, fire department people and civil servants; people that, in fact, do this and have some of the training by virtue of their civilian occupation and just enjoy doing it.

Q: Sure. What stands out to you now that you have some perspective on it – and I know you have a million things on your plate since then - about your time in New York; whether good, bad, things you would have liked to have had, things that you did?

CDR Grabb: What stands out for me in New York, and I gather you probably would have been able to find it in any small town, but what really was remarkable was the outpouring of public support, literally. And even with my gray hair - I was not around in World War II - maybe it happened back then. But no matter where we went, people were appreciative of the fact that we were there. We literally had people; Girl Scouts, dropping off cookies, people dropping off bags of clothes, shoes, shorts; things of this nature. Flags were flying everywhere. It was like the 4th of July everywhere that we went.

Q: A little different from Vietnam.

CDR Grabb: Well that's right. The weather cooperated and we had absolutely outstanding support in New York. It wasn't until I returned from New York that I started to get a measure of the depth of feeling that the public had. We're continuing to receive batches of mail from schools; elementary schools writing: Dear Solider/Sailor, I really appreciate what you're doing. I hope you get home soon, and things of this nature. But what became apparent to me is that when we got back and were released from active duty the 1st of November, a lot of our people went home to their spouses and families, and in talking to them came to realize that after 9/11 a lot of the people wanted to do whatever they could; give blood or what

not, do something, some sort of an outlet for that grief; that emotion, and they were grasping at straws as to what they could do. My people had the ability to contribute and to do it in real time. So I think it was both as a result of New York and when we came back that they really got an additional appreciation for the contribution that they were making. And we would have people in New York – some of my people went to Ground Zero, but we'd go over into lower Manhattan – we'd ride the ferries and people would come up, and without being even approached they'd say, "Are you the people with those little gun boats out there?" And we'd say, "Yes, we are." Then they would say, "I just want you to know that I'm sleeping so much better at night knowing that you're out there." You know it's a small thing, and given the size of New York Harbor, you're a drop in the proverbial bucket.

Q: But you're performing your visibility mission.

CDR Grabb: Well the visibility and being on the news and everything else was that little comfort that the people wanted to have. And I know the Mayor, if he could have kept us all winter long, then he would have.

Q: Sure. Is that part of your mission portfolio to - I know you don't have a PAO [Public Affairs Officer]. Well maybe you do, but at least maybe a collateral duty PAO. But you don't have a PA [Public Affairs Specialist] assigned to you when you establish a presence; a physical presence - also establish a media presence?

CDR Grabb: No. In New York the Coast Guard actually sent people up there and handled the coordination of the Public Affairs aspect.

Q: Right.

CDR Grabb: Now what would happen obviously is they'd bring people in and they'd say, well, can we interview you? Can we interview some of your security people? Can we get underway and take some pictures? And in working with the Public Affairs people with Activities New York and/or LANT Area 5th District, we tried to accommodate some of those requirements, especially with CNN and the National media, and things of this nature. I do not have a Public Affairs Officer, but even down here at GITMO there's a Joint Information Bureau, and basically they have, again, each of the Services are contributing Public Affairs personnel who are coordinating those working with the media; escorting them around. I'm not billeted, nor do I have the time to do that as a full time job. However, I think the Marines work the media and know how to use the media to their advantage, and I think the Coast Guard is learning that when you project a positive image and you've gotten Congressional delegations and other people here and it's on the news, that that, at least should pay dividends in the Appropriation Committees and things on the Hill, which is where a lot of the budgetary decisions are discussed.

Q: You must have been visited while you were there in New York by some of those delegations and higher ups in senior leadership. Do you recall any of those visits by LANTAREA, the Commandant; any of those folks coming to see how you were doing and how things were going?

CDR Grabb: The Commandant was at Activities New York. We actually escorted him onboard one of the 25s up through Hell's Gate on the East River. They had a service that was at the ball stadium. His son was on one of the 270s. We delivered cookies to him.

Q: I heard a story about that this morning, much to his chagrin I'm sure.

CDR Grabb: There were a number of Congressional delegations for which we provided security. One has to keep in mind that given the size of the boats that we use; 25 foot, that you can't bring on a 13-foot Codel. However, if a Codel (Congressional Delegation) is on one of the ferries in New York, and in this particular environment down here, we're very evident by virtue of the protection that we're providing around the . . .

Q: What sort of . . . well you were demobilized after late October or so . . . ?

CDR Grabb: That's correct.

Q: . . . and went home. And when did the – as you say, you watch CNN a lot – when did you start to think, or were told that this was going to be a possibility? It's my understanding that you're about to go to Bahrain and they pulled that off the table.

CDR Grabb: Well we were initially on tap back in August, prior to September 11th.

Q: Oh, so that was a pre-September 11th deployment?

CDR Grabb: Right. The Coast Guard, in dealing with Bahrain and the Navy, had rogered up to provide a security in that theater for the fiscal year. [PSU] 311 out of San Diego was tapped to provide the initial six months starting on October 1st and running through April 30th, or about March 31st. In August we were given a Preliminary Deployment Order basically saying 305 will end up having the second half of the upcoming fiscal year. So we thought that we would be in Bahrain from April 1st through September. After 9/11, when we and 307 were activated, 311 was still over there. When we were demobilized in early December Atlantic Area decided that they were going to tap 308 for the Bahraini mission.

Q: Right.

CDR Grabb: Now at the time the 308 was tapped for that, I think the understanding, or the realization, was 305 and 307 had just been activated; they'd been released. 311's over there. We're going to send 308. It was not until shortly after Christmas when some of the preliminary discussions regarding a potential mission here surfaced. I was aware of those ongoing discussions, but it was not until, like I say, the 11th of January when I basically got a call and was told the decision's been made. The Coast Guard is going to roger up for this mission and your unit has been tasked as the unit next in the cue, since 308 was slated for Bahrain. So that's when we were remobilized, and the first group of people arrived here on the 16th of January.

Q: You said you have had a good relationship with the Marines when you got here. What other sort of challenges have you faced here that, say, maybe are different from New York? You certainly knew how to pack up the gear by then.

CDR Grabb: Because we knew that we were going to go to Bahrain - when we returned from New York and were working on being released from active duty and being out processed - one of the first things that I wanted to do, and will be the same when we go back after this one, is basically restock, re-provision, repalletize.

Q: Get ready for the next one.

CDR Grabb: That's right. Because if nothing else, you get everything packed up. You've got a few things that you're waiting to receive. But once you're released the clock starts again, and if a call comes tomorrow I've got 96 hours.

Q: So you did that when you got back from New York?

CDR Grabb: Yes, and so we were basically ready.

Q: So you had a certain comfort level long before you got down here, at least in terms of any preparations?

CDR Grabb: Yes, right. There were a few things to do, and then we had considerable lead items we were trying to get; some replacement radar units. We needed a couple of replacement motors and things of that nature. But what we tried to do from the moment that we were up there is, as you use your expendables, keeping in mind what your requirements are and with the realization that I could be here,

and all of a sudden someone could say there's another mission of higher priority. Pack up, get ready, and we're sending you overseas.

Q: Wherever, yes.

CDR Grabb: I've got to be able to say, no problem. My requirements are to be operational for 30 days with fuel and water, and I've got everything that I need. So we try to keep that status.

Q: Since 9/11 - the discussion of standing up the MSSTs as active duty units - was there any discussion about giving them the OCONUS missions and bringing the Reserve PSUs back to do what they used to do, which is guard American ports?

CDR Grabb: Well the PSUs per say never really had a mission INCONUS [in the continental U.S.].

Q: Well the classic Reserve unit then?

CDR Grabb: And I think the answer to that too is no. I think from the standpoint of it's not as if the Naval Coastal Warfare or the naval mission has ceased.

Q: Uh hum.

CDR Grabb: The potential might even be higher.

Q: Right.

CDR Grabb: My understanding is that they've validated the need for 12 PSUs and they did that long ago, you know. And it's a question of manning and appropriations and recruiting, and things of this nature.

Q: Sure.

CDR Grabb: So that mission hasn't ceased. I think what 9/11 has emphasized is that the Coast Guard, in order to respond quickly, had OCONUS PSUs that they could refocus and pull up here. But that's not the answer. The answer really is to train up and have an INCONUS expertise, and I think with the funding for Homeland Security and the increase in personnel, that I think the expectation is probably that we're not creating these so that they can go overseas and do other things.

Q: So they need to be full-time guardians of strategic ports.

CDR Grabb: I think you'll find that this is likely going to be an active duty mission. And again, it's the realization that I may need them in this port for four days, and you go back to the firehouse mentality. We'll send an MSST down here while this high value asset comes in, refuels and leaves. So once that's done they can come back to the firehouse. Now I need them someplace else. And so you take your active duty component and you fly the boats and things down there. And the Navy was looking at some of that in the Med.

Q: Right.

CDR Grabb: When I've got ships that make ship calls in the ports, what I would really like to do is I'd like to have something there a couple of days in advance, setting up security. The ship comes in, they refuel, they re-provision. I provide them my security. The ship then sails and leaves and I pull that Fast Team, or whatever you're going to call it, back in.

Q: Sure.

CDR Grabb: And I think that's what they're really looking at from the Coast Guard standpoint; not of a continual presence, but if one had to provide something for an LNG ship or a high visibility target like OPSAIL, or some of those.

Q: Sure.

CDR Grabb: What can I get to send up there as opposed to having 50 of these things stood up continually around the clock in the 50 or 55 major ports?

Q: Well that brings up sort of an ancillary question, which is focused on your folks, which is, I guess most people join Reserve units because they want to be in the Reserves. Have these long deployments; subsequent follow on deployments, have these changed the nature of your retention strategies?

CDR Grabb: The jury is still out on that. The reason being the New York deployment was basically 45 days.

Q: And was in the middle of a national crisis.

CDR Grabb: Right. And even though people knew that tentatively we might be leaving in March, I didn't notice a considerable increase in the number of people that wanted to rotate, partly because we recruit and brief the people completely at the outset.

Q: You do, yes.

CDR Grabb: When people come to me it's almost like we interview them. You know the recruiter will send someone down or someone will say, I think I want to go to the PSUs, it sounds like fun.

Q: Just diffuse them of that notion.

CDR Grabb: Well we try to tell them that we train for deployments. We train for overseas. It could be for up to a year. And if this is not the right thing for you, either from a financial standpoint or a family standpoint, or a job standpoint, then you may want to rethink it. The Coast Guard needs people. But I would just as soon not spend the time training them and have them in the unit.

Q: Not to have them available.

CDR Grabb: I would try to shift them to a Group or an MSO, or something else.

Q: Right.

CDR Grabb: The people who come to the unit and say, yes, it's okay. I want to do it. We've not been deployed. In fact, even though they used the PSUs in Uphold Democracy in Haiti, this is a six-month or five-month deployment. It's only something that's been occurring in the last year, either in Bahrain or here. It's not lot like a carrier battlegroup. If you start doing six months out, home six months, six months out, people are going to say, I really can't take that. If it's like a carrier battlegroup and you go six months but you're home for 18 months . . .

Q: It's a different story.

CDR Grabb: Yes, it's a different story; a different rotational catch.

Q: Right. These Bahrain deployments, were these a result of the *Cole*; these kind of Force Protection deployments?

CDR Grabb: Yes, I mean subsequent to the *Cole*.

Q: So this was all stuff that was sort of in the pipeline before 9/11?

CDR Grabb: Oh yes.

Q: Do you see this on the . . . well I guess, as you said earlier, you see this as only something that's going to increase in importance; that you folks are going to be tasked to do this stuff all the time now.

CDR Grabb: I would say that the mission that we perform, and given the nature of the asymmetric warfare and the types of conflicts that we're looking at and the CinCs are looking at, my feeling is yes. This expertise is something that's going to be required. Now if the Coast Guard were to say, we're going to get out of it and the Navy's going to assume it, or someone else was going to do it, then yes. Our role; the Coast Guard's role, might diminish and we might be able to reprogram the resources into Homeland Security. However, I don't see the mission going away and I think, quite frankly, what we've seen in Bahrain and down here at GITMO is that what I would hope that we're doing through the media and our performance now, is impressing on the other Services that it is a joint environment. That there are five Services, and that if someone else has the ability and the capability, now does it make sense to reduplicate that with my own existing resources, or should I just say, hey, the Coast Guard has it. They do a good job. We're going to rely on them to provide this aspect and I'm going to use my resources in some other manner.

Q: Somewhere else. Does it help that in this joint world that you folks are wearing essentially joint uniforms?

CDR Grabb: Well I think it helps in that everyone . . . I mean whether you call it a Combat Utility Uniform; (CUU), a Battle Dress Uniform; (BDU), or whatever you call it, that yes, those people; the military, the Services are involved in military operations. And not diminishing "blue" military operations, but I mean typical military operations. There's a comfort level in that. While we roll our sleeves differently than the Air Force and the Army, we roll them the same as the Marines and the Navy. But yes, you're in one environment and you're not standing out. They look at you and they expect you to have the same sort of competencies and skill sets that any of the other people wearing these uniforms have. So I think it's good in that sort of a situation to blend; to be what one would expect, as opposed to someone who's standing out with a different uniform.

Q: Now that you've had six or eight months since 9/11 and you've been here - just about ready to leave here - how do you look back on this in terms of your career, in terms of the unit, and in general terms; things that you've accomplished, things that you might have done differently, things that worked and things that didn't work?

CDR Grabb: I'm extremely proud of the unit. And like most commanders, the success of the unit; the performance of the unit, is based on what I consider to be the high quality of the personnel that I'm fortunate to have underneath me.

Q: Uh hum.

CDR Grabb: I mean to the extent that we've done a good job or to the extent that we've done something to bring credit on the Coast Guard, it's not me. It's the people underneath me. As a Reserve officer, and with one of only six commands; six possible command opportunities in the Reserve structure, to be fortunate enough to have been selected to deploy with these people was certainly something that will be a high mark of my career. I mean there's nothing I could imagine once this tour is over that will be as rewarding as the current tour.

Now the other thing I try to impress on my people though, both at New York and here, and maybe it's just a function of age and I probably didn't feel this way when I was doing a 45-day patrol on an Ocean Weather Station when I was in my 20s, but the older I get the more I realize that time passes quickly and

they all realize that they're a part of history. You know that what they're doing here is something that few have had an opportunity to participate in. And as we look back now and say, well we've been here four months. In reality, yes, you don't know where the time went. At the outset it looks like . . .

Q: Four years.

CDR Grabb: . . . it's a long way ahead of you, but I think most of the people really feel like they've contributed, and, like I say, this is the high point of my career and I can't expect anything better, better than this I guess.

Q: I hadn't thought of that before or have been told that before that the PSUs are the only things left for a Reserve officer to have command of.

CDR Grabb: Yes.

Q: We don't have any Reserve vessels.

CDR Grabb: There are no Reserve vessels. When you're fully integrated with an active duty command you maybe shadow the XO or shadow a CO, but you do not get a command pin.

Q: Right.

CDR Grabb: So out of 8,000 Reservists, to be one of the six . . .

Q: That's a great honor, yes.

CDR Grabb: And as a Mustang, it's higher than I thought I'd get.

Q: Well Sir, I want to thank you very much for your time.

CDR Grabb: You're welcome Chief.

Q: This has been . . . I've been learning more about the Coast Guard than I ever would have dreamed. And although this is somewhat familiar territory, not only because I'm a Reservist and you guys are Reserves, but for what I was saying before that I started out in a port security unit with a bunch of cops and firemen in Providence, Rhode Island. So this is very familiar terrain, very comfortable for me to be here with you guys. It's when I get onto those helicopters and those big boats that I'm in unfamiliar territory.

Thank you very much.

