



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: **Lieutenant Commander Karl Leonard,
USCGR**

Operations Officer, Port Security Unit 305

Interviewer: PAC Peter Capelotti, USCGR

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Place: Port Security Unit 305, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba

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

LCDR Leonard: Going on 18 years.

Q: And could you give me a little bit of your career progression that got you to this point?

LCDR Leonard: Well I started off in the enlisted ranks as a PS [Port Security Specialist]. I came up through the ranks. I was a First Class Petty Officer at the time assigned to York River, which was out of RTC [Reserve Training Center] Yorktown at the time. In 1990 I got a direct commission into the Officer Corps and from there served at MSO [Marine Safety Office] Hampton Roads as an Ensign and LT(jg). Then I went over to Harbor Defense Command 205 and then over to the Port Security Unit [PSU].

Q: Can you give me a kind of overview of the structure of PSU 305?

LCDR Leonard: PSU 305; it's approximately a 145-person unit. Out of those 145 people, five are active duty billets, to include a lieutenant who handles the logistics and admin-type things, one MK [Machinery Technician], one BM [Boatswain's Mate], one GM [Gunner's Mate], an SK [Storekeeper] and then a YN [Yeoman].

Q: Right.

LCDR Leonard: So you've got an active duty enlisted in, really, each of the elements of the boat.

Q: And they're on active duty at the unit at Fort Eustis, is that right? You have a building or something where you operate out of?

LCDR Leonard: Right. We have a building out of . . . it's the back part of Fort Eustis Army Base, which is the Transportation Command. It allows us . . . they have a big port facility there; an acquired fleet of vessels themselves, which also allows us the opportunity to have a place to splash our boats; take them out. We don't leave our boats in the water overnight for the most part.

Q: These are Army vessels?

LCDR Leonard: Right, LCMs [Landing Craft, Medium].

Q: Small boats.

LCDR Leonard: And some large boats.

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

LCDR Leonard: The morning of September 11th I was sitting in . . .

Q: Well first, before we get there, let me ask you what you do in civilian life.

LCDR Leonard: I'm a Captain with the Chesterfield, Virginia Police Department. I'm a District Commander in my current assignment. It was then.

Every Tuesday we have much like an Officer's Call. It's our Duty Officer's meeting every Tuesday morning at 0900. I remember sitting in this meeting with . . . and it's everybody Captain and above . . . The Chief of Police was conducting the meeting and he got a page and he stepped out. He came back in and said, you know a plane just hit the Trade Center. Initially we thought an aviation accident or something like that. Then he got a second page, stepped out and came back in and said, a second plane hit the other Tower. At that point we knew it was more than just an accident. It was terrorists. Immediately we set our whole terrorist plan into effect. There are a lot of the things local police departments had to do on their level. So that's where it took off from.

Q: Do you remember your first contact with the unit?

LCDR Leonard: Yes, it was kind of an unusual event for me. There's a petty officer in this unit; Rick Reese, who I've worked with for 21 years, and we're neighbors; we're best friends. And since we're in the same unit we do everything together. To save transportation we always drive down together and always stay in the same hotel room together. We always do everything together. It's just easier.

The next morning; September 12th, our unit did a Call-up on September 11th. That night they called everybody up and said, be there, and this and that. However, I didn't get called. The next morning; September 12th, I was at work. I had a lot to do because we were implementing our measures on local law enforcement, and I got a page to call Petty Officer Reese. So I called him at home and he said, where are you? I said, I'm at work. Where are you? He said, well I'm at home. I'm waiting for you to pick me up. I said, what are you talking about Rick? He said, we're going to activate. We're deploying. I said, no we're not. He said, yes, everybody's got to deploy. We got called up last night. I said, Rick, nobody called me up. We're not going to deploy. You're jerking my chain. He said, no I'm not. I'm packed up and ready to go. I said, I'll call you right back. I called the unit. Now it's a Wednesday so nobody's at the unit traditionally. The first ring the XO [Executive Officer] picks up the phone. As soon as the XO answers I know something's up. I said, XO, what's going on? Ahh, we're being deployed. You've got to report by 0900. It's like 0700. I said, XO, nobody called me. He said, nobody called you? I said, no. I was the one that dropped through the system. So I had two hours to tell my boss I was leaving, to tell my wife, go pack for a year deployment, go get my kids out of school and say, hey, I'm leaving, and within two hours I was at the unit with Reese.

Q: And you drove up to New York?

LCDR Leonard: We convoyed up to New York. The majority of the Unit went in two buses that we chartered. I was in the actual convoy moving the boats, the armory, the trucks and the equipment.

Q: Can you give me a sense of - as Operations Officer - what you had to do when you got there and how operations sort of evolved once you got there?

LCDR Leonard: Okay. First of all, having literally hours notice, there wasn't a lot of pre-planning done. We didn't do our traditional advance party; SLRP.

Q: What's that?

LCDR Leonard: SLRP (Surveillance, Logistics, Recon, and Planning) is your advance party that goes in and looks at where your ramps are, where your housing's going to be and where you can get your food.

Q: Right.

LCDR Leonard: We had none of that. We were operating in the blind. We knew we had to be in New York Harbor. We knew we had to secure New York Harbor.

Q: Was there much communication going back and forth between you and whoever as you were driving up?

LCDR Leonard: None.

Q: So you just sort of went up there blind.

LCDR Leonard: Right. We were told where to go; report to Activities New York. The guards will stop you. They'll know what to do after that.

Q: Right.

LCDR Leonard: So that's as much instruction as we had. We got in. It was a really slow time to get in there because you're towing all the boats and everything. And plus once you get into New York, access to New York was shut down. We had to call the State Police and they had to come escort us. So we got in late at night, like one o'clock, two o'clock in the morning. All they could tell me was, okay, check in here, berth there, park your boats there. I knew I had the USNS *Comfort* [T-AH 20] coming in the next day; the U.S. Navy's hospital ship *Comfort*.

Q: Right.

LCDR Leonard: That was an asset. That's a very important asset.

Q: Were you tasked when you got there, or soon after you got there, with escorting that vessel in?

LCDR Leonard: No. I was aware of it coming in and I knew that was going to be one of our responsibilities. We actually got a quick brief at 0600 in the morning with all our responsibilities and that's where we got our assignments, our taskings and all of that. I knew I had the *Comfort* coming in. We had these boats. I had to get boats in the water. Our mission is water and if we don't get the boats in the water we're not doing our mission. What I had to do is find crane operators because two of our boats were on flatbeds. The other four we pulled in. I had to find a ramp I could put them in. None of this was done. So I had to go out and spend my morning looking, you know, where can I get a crane? Where can I offload these? Where can I put them in the water? Finally I went to the Statue of Liberty Park in New Jersey and talked to the Park Ranger there, which the park was shut down. I said, look, I've got these boats and I've got to get them in the water. Where can I put them in? He said, well

we've got ramp. I'll open it up for you and you can put your boats in there. So I had all the boats towed over there. I had to have my weapons guy bring all the weapons over there so they could meet up. We're standing in the Statue of Liberty State Park loading 50 cal and [M] 60s on the boats while they're still on the trailers, and it's attracting a lot of attention.

Q: Oh yes.

LCDR Leonard: By the time it was done we had . . . the road was lined with cars that had stopped, people coming out just taking photographs. I mean gunboats in New York Harbor are unique.

Q: Unusual.

LCDR Leonard: It's unusual. This was a war zone and we were operating . . .

Q: Did you have a sense of, for lack of a better word, surprise on the part of people coming by seeing you that there was the Coast Guard unloading these gunboats in New York Harbor?

LCDR Leonard: Oh, absolutely. You could tell that they were not so much stunned but very much surprised, and I mean happy we were there, but surprised. I think it brings some realization to the whole thing. Yes, we were attacked, and yes, this is a war zone. Now we've got gunboats patrolling our harbor. So we got a lot of attention and it was really surreal for us because where we put in the boats was right across from the Trade Center and at that time; just a day after the attack, the smoke was still billowing, coming right over us, so you had all of that.

But we splashed our boats. We got the first two boats in the water as the *Comfort* was underneath the Verazanno Narrows Bridge transiting to its pier. So you talk about timing being everything. We met up with her, took her to the pier, and from that day forward maintained a 24/7 presence on her. We also were tasked with Harbor Security. All of New York Harbor was shut down, which was just amazing. We were responsible for that. We were also responsible for Ground Zero area; the waterfront.

Q: Were there any breaches of security or threat warnings while you were there?

LCDR Leonard: What do you mean by threat warnings?

Q: You know, of vessels running security zones and things like that, things that you thought that could be taken, or mistaken, for contacts?

LCDR Leonard: Yes. Well we had a few incidents happen. The timing of this, you've got to understand, it's September. It's the fall. Everybody from up north; the sunbirds, were going down to Florida or the Bahamas or what have you, left places north of New York including Canada and the United States.

Q: Going on pleasure cruises and things like that.

LCDR Leonard: Right. They normally go down to Florida or the Bahamas for the winter and they always stop in New York City for a layover. All those people were inport. Not all those but definitely a lot; a great deal of them were inport when this happened. And we shut down the port. You know there's no place for them to be. The harbors were full. There is no pier space. They weren't planning on this stay. They didn't have the food. They didn't have the fuel. So it really inconvenienced a lot of people. And we had a few try to leave. They'd say, no, I'm going south. You know, it's like, no you're not. You know, peek into this 50 cal.

Q: Yes.

LCDR Leonard: You're not going anywhere.

Q: That a good point. Do you get a different type of response from the public because you're so overtly weaponized?

LCDR Leonard: Absolutely. Having been in the blue suit white hull Coast Guard, as you have too, typically when you go talk to, especially like fishermen or crabbers, you get a lot of tension and a lot of argument. Even pleasure craft, saying, hey skipper, where's your PFDs [Personal Flotation Devices] for your crew? Even on families you'd get a lot of feedback. These boats we don't get feedback. When we give instructions people are like, okay, we're leaving now. It's a lot different than being on a white boat, absolutely.

Q: You were there for about 45 days?

LCDR Leonard: Yes, if not longer, I think so. We got there September 12th/13th and left towards the end of October. I'm not sure.

Q: What was the nature of the interaction between you folks and, say, small boats from Station New York? What kind of interaction is there between, say, the traditional SAR [Search and Rescue] boats and the PSU boats?

LCDR Leonard: Well first of all the SAR boats had a whole new mission. They were now gunboats.

Q: Right.

LCDR Leonard: They were now patrol boats, no war zone. I hate to say it but that's what they were. They don't have tactics. You know they can go out and do a search and rescue or a man overboard or that. It's very unusual for them to do this type of operation. So no strike to them, but they were really out of their league.

Q: Right.

LCDR Leonard: As were we. It was not a traditional operation for us either. So every morning at 0600 I had a meeting with all the Operational Heads, from the entire Coast Guard Operations, and in there were the 47-foot boats; their operations people were there and we had LEDET [Law Enforcement Detachment] down there with their long rigid hulls [RHIBs: Rigid Hull Inflatable Boats]. So we all worked together. It really was a good team effort.

Q: So you would coordinate with them every morning just to see where everybody was?

LCDR Leonard: We knew everybody's limitations and capabilities. We really worked it out.

Q: Did you try to double up forces, say if you had a 41, would you put it with one of your boats or did you guys sort of stay separate from . . . did they have their own . . . ?

LCDR Leonard: We had specific tasks. They had specific tasks. We had two 270s that were out there as CTUs; Command Task Units. [USCGC] *Tahoma* [WMEC-908] was one and the [USCGC] *Campbell* [WMEC-909] was the other, and they worked two different areas of New York Harbor. The *Campbell* was outside the VZ [Verrazano] Bridge and handled everything seaward. The *Tahoma* was right off of Governor's Island and handled everything inside the harbor. So they coordinated everything. We were all sub-units out of that. But it was a site to see because you'd look out and literally, without exaggerating, you had 80 Coast Guard boats on the water between cutters and RHIBs and everything in between, because they came from all over; every small boat station everywhere, but not a single civilian craft. So it was amazing.

Q: Yes, a Coast Guard flotilla.

LCDR Leonard: Absolutely.

Q: Did you also start to patrol along Staten Island where they started to bring the debris from the World Trade Center? Were you in that area as well?

LCDR Leonard: Right. I was also responsible for Intel at the time for the unit and every morning at five o'clock I'd get an Intel brief, and at the time it was very, very active Intel of imminent threats and attacks going to happen in New York Harbor. So we really had to look at our strategy deployment of our boats.

One of things we knew might happen was attacks on the water facilities, the nuclear plant they had there, and other things along the shoreline and these are all on the Kill Van Kulls River, the East River and the Harlem River. So we actually had to do a two-boat riverine patrol; something totally new. It's not part of our normal operation.

Q: You're mostly Harbor Operations/Port Operations.

LCDR Leonard: Port Operations.

Q: Was this the first time that the unit had done river patrols?

LCDR Leonard: Pretty much.

Q: Pretty much.

LCDR Leonard: I mean these are riverine patrols.

Q: Is there a qualitative difference; one to the other?

LCDR Leonard: Absolutely.

Q: I know that you have a lot more limited space to operate, say a 50 caliber machine gun certainly, but.

LCDR Leonard: Well see, that's the thing we had to stress to our people. You know we're in a very high threat . . . we were in Delta. You don't get any higher than Delta initially, and then we went down to Charlie. I had to tell my people, I guarantee you 100-percent if you fire that weapon you will not miss hitting somebody. You might be missing the person you're aiming at but this is New York City. You will hit somebody. You've got a four-mile range on a .50 cal and in the harbor of New York you're going to hit somebody. So these guys really had to be disciplined and they were. But traditionally our response for Port Operations is a set area we're protecting; an asset, which could be the *Comfort*, the OEM here, or at Ground Zero where we were, and we worked within three zones; a reaction zone. Traditionally they're a thousand yards each but where we were operating the whole harbor wasn't two thousand yards wide, so.

Q: Right.

LCDR Leonard: So you have a reaction zone, security zone and a safety zone. And one boat's in the reaction zone. If you get in the reaction zone you're going to meet resistance. If you go in the security zone we're going to try to shoulder you or bump you. We're going to hail you off. In the security zone it's more, first we're going to contact you. So that's a traditional PSU. River patrols; you're on the hunt. You're out there looking; random patrols, going in and out little fingers. It's totally different, your posture is.

Q: Right.

LCDR Leonard: In fact we actually had one situation where we caught two people on a bridge. It turned out they were from a college doing a research program. Totally off limits. But it caused a lot of stir because you had to get the local police up there and they ran the pedal to the metal. So the riverine patrol was totally different. I can't tell you what your asset is. I can't tell you where to patrol. It's random. You do it. You know, look out.

Q: Was there any occasion to fire any of the .50 calibers the whole time you were in New York?

LCDR Leonard: None. Now towards the end we had a situation, which could have gotten critical. We had a squadron of boats; just a boat club that wanted to do a V-formation in front of Ground Zero. They started coming in and we headed them off. They got rambunctious. They were actually making a run from New York City to a place on Long Island. This was a weekend run, and this is later on. The port was closed for the first four weeks we were there; totally closed. You couldn't move. Then it was open Monday through Friday, 8-1600. Then it was open seven days and then it was, you know, open.

Q: Right.

LCDR Leonard: Later on when these boats were out there we intercepted them and the leader of the group was really perturbed. He said, no, I'm going to do it, and we're going to go back there and we want to do a V-formation in front of Ground Zero. We told them, we said, that's a restricted area. You cross that line and you're going to encounter fire, and we manned the weapons at that point and we charged the weapons because they were intent on coming in. Now a fast boat coming in at an asset, that's a typical threat. That's what we practice for. So there was no way we were going to let it happen. He got the hint and they moved on and there were no further incidents. But, you know, it could have been.

Q: Yes.

LCDR Leonard: We almost had an incident with a boat that broke in that had Geraldo Rivera on it, trying to get a better shot.

Q: Well then you would have probably gotten cheers to take that one out.

LCDR Leonard: Oh, that one I think I probably would have taken out.

Q: Gotten a medal for that one (Laughter).

LCDR Leonard: Other than that it was very heightened awareness. You always had the possibility . . . it was eerie too because there was nothing in the sky. There was not a single plane. If you know New York there's not a second without 20 of them up there.

Q: The sound, yes.

LCDR Leonard: And then my guys, knowing what had happened prior to that, you know, what do you do when you have that next plane coming in? Do I fire at them from my boat?

Q: Did you talk about such a thing, because you guys have the range to do something about it?

LCDR Leonard: Well right, we do. Now whether we could bring a plane down before it strikes a building . . . we can blow it up, yes. Otherwise we're just putting holes in it. But you know if you can maybe steer it off course a little bit, maybe you'll save lives. So I sat down and I talked to my guys. I said, realistically you're probably not going to see anything because they've got F-15s up there now. But it's a judgment call guys. You see a plane coming in at 200 feet heading straight for a building. I know what's going to happen. You know what's going to happen. So you have to do something. And what's tough is how do you tell – and I feel for those F-15 pilots - how do you tell somebody to shoot down an American airliner with 350 Americans on it?

Q: Yes. Well its part of this new war that we just can't get used to.

LCDR Leonard: Right.

Q: You have people that are willing to use weapons like that, and how do you fight them?

LCDR Leonard: Right.

Q: You guys didn't have a whole lot of time off at home when you were asked to come down here. I guess you were already preparing to go to Bahrain before 9/11?

LCDR Leonard: Right. We got released for active duty in November and we knew we had been previously tasked to go to Bahrain or some place in the Middle East. It was still uncertain; one of three ports we were going to go too. And that was a March 12th deployment, so we knew that was coming and we were ready for that. We were actually looking forward to that. And then in January we had this call, and I did get called this time.

Q: Yes.

LCDR Leonard: It was really unexpected. Again, it was a very quick turnaround, but compared to the hours after September 11th it seemed like we had weeks to plan for this one, which we really didn't. So it was unexpected, but we did it. Our motto is "Whatever it takes", and we live by it.

Q: Did this deployment present any special challenges to the unit?

LCDR Leonard: Yes. We've never been deployed this long before. Now mind you, we've been deployed all over the world. We've done that and we're good at it. We can pack up, load our Unit up to be deployed with the boats in the water anywhere in 96 hours and we've proved that. Now the longevity of a six-month deployment we've never done and that was definitely a test.

Q: What was the longest deployment this unit's done before this?

LCDR Leonard: Probably New York.

Q: Yes, and how about before that, these two-week evolutions where you do . . . ?

LCDR Leonard: Well we've done some three-week evolutions. We've done some operations like in Egypt and places like that.

Q: Well I guess it's safe to say that psychologically this has been a big change for everybody to be away?

LCDR Leonard: Oh, absolutely. In a way it maybe would have been easier if we were in the Middle East.

Q: Yes, being so close and yet so far away.

LCDR Leonard: Yes, right, and the comforts of home to some degree here, wherein the Middle East it's clear.

Q: Right.

LCDR Leonard: You know, I'm away, they're over there.

Q: Do you see that having an affect on retention and recruitment?

LCDR Leonard: Absolutely. I think you're going see - and not just for PSUs, I think military - all military branches are going to see Reservists called up. We're under a two-year Presidential recall and our orders are for one year. People are going see that the Reservists are going to be called up. I think some people in our unit honestly took a crapshoot. You know I want to play with the gunboats. I want the fast boats. This is sleek. We throw the dice; you know, I won't get deployed. I won't get deployed. I won't get deployed. And boom, here's two deployments.

Q: Came up lemons.

LCDR Leonard: Right. It doesn't bother me.

Q: Well statutorily, in a traditional Reserve sense under Title 14, isn't it no more than two 30-days deployments over four years, is that what is?

LCDR Leonard: No.

Q: Or every 48 months?

LCDR Leonard: You could be called up for up to two years.

Q: But under Title 10.

LCDR Leonard: Right.

Q: But under that traditional Title 14, like floods or what not, the Secretary . . .

LCDR Leonard: Right, no, I'm sorry, yes.

Q: I think that it's no more than two deployments every four years and then after your second deployments over the clock starts again.

LCDR Leonard: Right.

Q: So yes, this is a big sea change for you guys because you have had the equivalent of four deployments in less than a year.

LCDR Leonard: Right, and its starting to take its toll now. We've got a lot of young people in this unit who are trying to get their college out of the way.

Q: That's right.

LCDR Leonard: It's very difficult to do when you keep getting snatched away. We've got people having kids. We just had one have a baby and he wasn't there. And you've got people trying to put lives together and they keep getting torn away from those lives. So retention is going to be a very difficult issue.

Q: Is that something that's been addressed up the chain since you've been here, that these issues are cropping up, and will crop up? Do you address that, or are you going to address that, in a systematic way in the future?

LCDR Leonard: It'll be addressed after we get back to garrison. We actually have a list of probably 40/50 requests for transfers, either out . . .

Q: Really?

LCDR Leonard: Right. And once those actually get sent in, that's when . . .

Q: That's 40 or 50 out of 140!

LCDR Leonard: Right.

Q: Wow!

LCDR Leonard: And that's so far. But you know you've got to look at the human side of it too.

Q: Oh sure, yes. Well there's no question about it. I think that's pretty sobering though, and the Coast Guard's going to have to look at how they do business if they're going to have those kinds of attrition rates.

LCDR Leonard: That's right.

Q: You can't afford to stand up a unit and then lose a third of it after every deployment.

LCDR Leonard: Now why not go to a traditional MSO where I'm going to do my one weekend a month, go inspect CONEXs, and go home.

Q: Right.

LCDR Leonard: And when a war starts, you know I'm still . . .

Q: I'm sitting here answering the phone at the MSO.

LCDR Leonard: The MSO. Why not do that as opposed to coming to a PSU where I'm going to be deployed. We have no INCONUS billet operation/mission. We know that. So when we get deployed we know we're going somewhere else.

Q: Has that ever been an issue that you've talked about inside the unit, because traditionally the Reserve unit was to guard a port? I mean my Reserve unit, that's what we did. We guarded the port of Providence.

LCDR Leonard: Right.

Q: Is there any sense of going back to that old Reserve structure? I know they're standing up active duty MSST [Marine Safety and Security Teams] units for domestic ports.

LCDR Leonard: Right.

Q: Has there been any discussions about standing up active duty PSUs for foreign ports so that they're not depending on Reservists to go to, say, Bahrain or somewhere for six months?

LCDR Leonard: No, I've not heard about that. Now I know we are training, like the Yemen. We trained them. I was in Bahrain with HTC and we were training their people.

You know the Navy has the IBUs [Inshore Boat Unit]. They're trying to bring them up to speed. They're really similar to PSUs. But then again they're rotating in and out of these foreign ports every six months too.

Q: Because you're almost taking on the character not of a Reserve unit anymore.

LCDR Leonard: Right, we are just a frequent traveling active duty Port Control Unit.

Q: Exactly. And when you're back home you're getting ready for the next thing.

LCDR Leonard: Right. I think with the overseas is, there's not always a U.S. presence there so you really don't need a full time Port Control Unit.

Q: Right.

LCDR Leonard: You know, when Navy ships come in, yes, you want to have something there. When there's an operation going you want to have something there. But around the clock, pretty much not.

Q: Before this came up you were going to go to Bahrain and that was going to be a six-month deployment?

LCDR Leonard: Yes.

Q: Why was that?

LCDR Leonard: I don't know the history. I believe it all stems out of the [USS] *Cole* [DDG-67] attack.

Q: But why not say a series of 30-day deployments with different PSUs?

LCDR Leonard: I'm not sure.

Q: I know that you've got the expense, obviously, in the logistics and all of that. But you also have this other issue of attrition that you're going to stand up if you do that.

LCDR Leonard: Right. I'm not sure if it's just because that's the way we've always done it and we don't want to look out of the box. You know even down here . . . everybody down here is either a six-month or a three month or a one year, and I don't know why we always look at it in those terms. Why not a four-month deployment?

Q: Or two-months or whatever.

LCDR Leonard: Or two months, I mean why is it always either a three or a six? A three probably is too short really. If you want to get your money back out of your investment you want to go look at longer than three. Six is definitely too long. I think a four-month deployment is better.

Q: A four might be better, yes.

LCDR Leonard: You know, that's a third of the year. You know between three units you could cover it.

Q: Right.

LCDR Leonard: If I did four-months on and eight-months off I think it would be a lot more manageable.

Q: Yes. How does this affect . . . most of the guys in the unit are cops or firemen. I mean there's been a renewed emphasis on them specifically since 9/11? How has this affected you guys, because you're probably the most police officers I've interviewed in the Coast Guard?

LCDR Leonard: Right. It's funny. Desert Storm; we all got called up during Desert Storm. I know stories of police officers that were fired, terminated when they left. I missed out on a promotion. We had a lot of that negative stuff that contributed to it. We had to come back. We had to hire attorneys. We had to fight for jobs, promotions and everything else. It's unusual. This time, I think because it struck the heart of America, the support was overwhelming as far as, yes, go. I mean, we're giving you benefits. We're paying this. We're paying that. So the police officers, as far as that front, have really been taken care of. We're getting a lot of benefits from our departments. The other side of the coin is, you're right. The day; September 9/11 - that attacked happened - domestic terrorism is a priority to local law enforcement. They now have to step up programs in their towns, cities, villages and counties. They need to implement stronger watches with more personnel here. So the task on them, a burden, was really increased tremendously, and while we're increasing the responsibility we're taking away their officers.

Q: Right.

LCDR Leonard: So really it had an adverse impact. My department alone I think had 45 officers called up.

Q: Forty-five?

LCDR Leonard: Forty-five out of 500.

Q: Wow! So ten percent of the workforce is all of a sudden gone, probably when they need ten percent more?

LCDR Leonard: Right, and that's what the difference of this deployment is is Desert Storm didn't impact local law enforcement.

Q: Right.

LCDR Leonard: Enduring Freedom does.

Q: Do you feel that you're a better prepared Captain now to deal with domestic terrorism scenarios with all this experience?

LCDR Leonard: Yes. It's funny because . . .

Q: Does it have any affect on your civilian job?

LCDR Leonard: Oh, I take a lot of this back and it really helps my civilian job, both personally and the department, what I bring back. But there's also a lot from the department I bring through here which helps out tremendously.

Q: Sure.

LCDR Leonard: They both really help each other out and there are a lot of times here where I've had to go back and say, well, this is how you do it in law enforcement. You know we're in that type of thing. So they really compliment each other a lot.

Q: Well you make a good fit for the Coast Guard having such heavy law enforcement responsibilities.

LCDR Leonard: Right.

Q: We're about eight months removed now from 9/11. Where do you fit this into your own career and into the unit. What kind of things do you think that you would have done differently, or what things worked or what things didn't work?

LCDR Leonard: I think, strictly talking about our unit; I think our personnel . . . I think there needs to be a real realization of what you're signing up for. I can't speak for recruiters. I know there's a lot of pressure. Even before 9/11 there was tons of pressure to increase the Reserve Force. I don't know what recruiters are telling people or how much pressure they're under to sign, sign, sign. But I'm finding out a lot of our members are just not prepared financially. They didn't realize the possibilities. I think if we do it different, before anybody sets foot in this unit, they need to know, hey, it's not a matter of you "may" deploy. You will be deploying.

Q: Yes.

LCDR Leonard: Somewhere in this career, in this unit, you will be deployed. It will be for a long time and it will be at your current rank salary. So it shouldn't be a shock to you.

Q: Do you see your entrance interviews, for lack of a better term, for people coming into the unit, being altered now as a result of all of this experience?

LCDR Leonard: I think . . . we always have them at our CO [Commanding Officer] and XO level. We always interview everybody coming in and they're pretty up front. I think, again, maybe it was that crapshoot. You know, okay, yes, there's no war; nothing's going on.

Q: No war or nothing, yes. And this really, literally came out of a clear blue sky one morning.

LCDR Leonard: Oh, absolutely, and a lot of people were caught. You know they had to leave their college programs. They had to leave their work. They had to leave their families. Yes, so I think if we had to do it different, everybody needs to know it's not a matter of maybe. It's a matter of when, and are you prepared? Six months is a long time.

Q: Right. Do you see the Coast Guard treating Port Security differently now with more emphasis than they did before 9/11; that it's finally taken its place sort of in the overall mission setup of the Coast Guard?

LCDR Leonard: I figure they're going to treat Port Security differently but I don't know if it's in the sense that we're talking Port Security. If we're talking about Homeland Port Security, I think it's a bit difference than the gunboats we operate. You know, there you have the Captain of the Ports. You have a little bit more authority. When we're in foreign ports it's totally different.

Q: Right.

LCDR Leonard: But yes, I think it's all going to be looked at differently. I think they need to look at recruitment differently. Units like this almost - and I don't want to take anything away from the submariners - but it's almost like Sub Service. You're going to have to get committed, dedicated individuals, and you may have to enhance that carrot to get people to come over here.

Q: Alright.

LCDR Leonard: Again, you know why at E-4, E-5 pay do I want to do this when I can go to an MSO, sit in an air conditioned office and just listen to the radio.

Q: Right.

LCDR Leonard: What's the benefit of me being in a port security unit right now? So maybe we need to look at that. I don't know.

Q: Well Sir, thank you. Are there any final thoughts that you have that you want to share before we wrap this up?

LCDR Leonard: No, I think both the New York operation; Guarding Liberty, and this operation, are totally untraditional operations for port security units. It's nowhere in our operational doctrine; what we've trained for or what we've planned for. But in both instances you'll find that we adapted and we fit the bill tremendously. We did the job tremendously.

Q: Do you think that was in the minds of, say, LANTAREA [Coast Guard Atlantic Area] or the Commandant when they sort of reflectively called you guys up to guard a port in this situation; that that kind of role is really not what you trained for?

LCDR Leonard: I don't think they knew what our role was, and I'm not slighting them.

Q: I think you're absolutely right.

LCDR Leonard: I think they said hey, attack on New York. We're getting the gunboats out.

Q: Right.

LCDR Leonard: I think it was a good call. We need them. Get the gunboats. What's their role going to be? [The Commander of Activities New York, Rear] Admiral [Richard] Bennis, they're yours. They're chopped to you . . .

Q: Do whatever you want, yes.

LCDR Leonard: And that's when it got down to that lower level. Admiral Bennis said, okay, I've got PSU boats. I've got 47s coming from Boston. I've got these. Okay, this is what I want. So I think at the District level, Area level, great. Kick those boats out there. But I don't think they had any idea of what role we would play. We didn't know until the day we got there and then really it continued to develop after we actually deployed the boats. Our role has changed.

Q: Yes.

LCDR Leonard: They changed here, so very adaptable. I think that's a big part of it.

Q: That's great.

END OF INTERVIEW

