



*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

### Interviewee: Rear Admiral Erroll M. Brown, USCG Commander, 13th Coast Guard District

Interviewer: PAC Peter Capelotti, USCGR

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Place: Office of the 13th Coast Guard District, Seattle, Washington



**Q:** I'm in the office of the 13th District Commander; Rear Admiral Brown, and we're talking about his time in the District there, and we just started discussing a little bit about when you came here and the kind of things that you deal with as district commander; what's a typical day like in the Pacific Northwest. Then later on we'll get into 9-11 and that sort of thing.

So tell me a little bit about your career progression to this point, Sir, and how you got to be District Commander out here in the Pacific Northwest.

**RADM Brown:** Well as I said, we'll give you that documentation and a bio. But briefly stated, '72 Coast Guard Academy graduate; naval engineer. I had a series of engineering tours afloat and ashore, culminating, and specifically having had the opportunity to be on icebreakers; 378s [378-foot high endurance cutters], on the afloat side. On the shore side I have had an opportunity to work in the Chief of Staff's office staff on the budget; budget bills. I became the Budget Officer for the Coast Guard. I had an opportunity to go off to the Naval War College in the process. I also had an opportunity to be an instructor at the Coast Guard Academy, so I was kind of bouncing back and forth between engineering and policy. I had an opportunity to work for the Secretary of Transportation to see policy decisions at its highest levels. I had an opportunity to command one of our newest structural organizational changes in terms of the Integrated Support Command; ISC, and from there I was selected as a flag officer and had an opportunity to be the Maintenance and Logistics Commander for Atlantic [MLCLANT], responsible for all the maintenance throughout the Atlantic Area, leading a fine team of men and women. And from that point selected to be the 13th District Commander.

**Q:** Let me ask you a question about the MLCLANT because I may not get a chance to talk to that Admiral. In a situation like 9-11, how involved do you think they would have been - this was a big surge of keeping these platforms up and running - or would that be more on the operational side of things?

**RADM Brown:** Well they would be enormously involved and impacted by it. While we have organizationally separated operations and support, I think it's no question that the two are linked. For example, we surge ops [operations] but it's support that provides us the sustainability. So our ability to continue to do anything is heavily predicated upon our support systems. They also have their own commands that they need to be concerned about in terms of self-protection. So they had a dual responsibility meeting the emergent challenges of high ops tempo plus unit self-protection.

**Q:** You are also an author?

**RADM Brown:** Yes, but those texts are a bit dated. I had an opportunity to work with Professor Harry Benford in the seventies on a text at the University of Michigan. We did some computerizing of Mr. Petercee's dynamic programming, which lent itself to a computer application for predicting economic life of vessels based upon relevant criteria.

**Q:** Yes.

**RADM Brown:** And it was interesting at the time, but I showed some of it to my son and he laughed as I pulled out the punch cards and things.

**Q:** My first job was punching those punch cards 25 years ago. The computer was about the size of this room.

**RADM Brown:** How true.

**Q:** And you've been here since 2000, is that right, as District Commander?

**RADM Brown:** I got here in June of 2000 so I was a little over a year. In my second year is when 9-11 occurred.

**Q:** Yesterday was my first day ever in the Pacific Northwest and just seeing the array of hardware along the waterfront - you have a fairly massive . . . just here in the Seattle area - port security infrastructure or port infrastructure. How much of that was on your radar screen before 9-11, and coming here in the middle of 2000, were there any aftershocks from folks trying to sneak over the border with explosives for Y2K [Year 2000 technology problem] and all of that? How much of that was taking up your time; port security-wise?

**RADM Brown:** Well that's a really tough question. I probably could have done, or probably should have done more intellectual prep for this interview. But one of the things that was pretty apparent to me was, as you know, it is significantly different, the feeling being in something and the feeling reporting on or reading about something.

**Q:** Sure.

**RADM Brown:** So I'm trying to set myself back in terms of where we were before it happened; what was the day like and what was life like, and then when it happened.

**Q:** Do you see a big psychological barrier there now? I mean is life so much different for you as a District Commander now after 9-11?

**RADM Brown:** Yes, it really is different now. Let me see if I can try and picture what I considered my life to be like before. Every District Commander will tell you, and every District Commander is right, that their district is unique. We have . . . this is a large coastal district with breaking bars and dramatic surf. So we have a lot of search and rescue [SAR] along the coast. Out of our SAR stations we have high angle cliff rescues, and so we have a coastal SAR responsibility that is dramatically different than what you find here in the port outside of my window.

**Q:** Yes.

**RADM Brown:** So it's almost bifurcated. We have that and, as then you said, we have Portland and we have here in Seattle, large ports. But I think if you think back at the time there was a strong national emphasis to expedite commerce. And as a matter of fact, just-in-time inventory was a hallmark and things were really predicated on their ability to move things very, very quickly. Inventories were practically at zero. So we had flow; flow both internally in terms of intermodal connections and also internationally. So the relationship with Canada was looked at as a relationship where we could move things through the border very, very quickly. And I think that's a completely different paradigm than we find ourselves in the day after 9-11 when we wanted to be very cautious about everything that flowed, and that's dramatically different. So if you ask me about that, I think that when look back, just prior to 9-11, our maritime focus was a bit more in the region, on the environmental protection and safe movement of oil. This area has been very focused on that post-*Exxon Valdez* [on March 24, 1989, the tanker *Exxon Valdez* grounded in Prince William Sound, Alaska, and spilled nearly 11 million gallons of oil] and we've just come off of a recent Supreme Court case where the State was challenging what the Federal standards were. Basically - my words saying - that the bar was too low and that the State was looking to have some other safety measures put in place. So we find ourselves in a long-term risk management panel where we're trying to leverage those kinds of things against the Federal standards. So that was more of our focus at the time; commerce flow. We were trying to have it moved expeditiously. We continued to have our focus on those carriers who presented some risk to us, and so that was more of the focus than anything else in the ports.

**Q:** Let me ask you Sir, what's a typical day like for you, just in general? When do you come into the office; those sorts of things?

**RADM Brown:** Well I have some bad habits that I prefer not to pass on to others. But I tend to come in a little early. I kid some other folks about, I'm in here at 0'dark-thirty but don't worry about it. Then I add a little bit to the end of the day. My strategy is, come in a little early. It gives you a little bit of quiet time to think and organize the day and get some of the things done that you might not be able to get done otherwise.

**Q:** Sure.

**RADM Brown:** There's also a time difference between here and the East Coast and that kind of contributes to the opportunity to come in here a little early.

**Q:** Quiet time is not something the Coast Guard seems to provide a lot of.

**RADM Brown:** Yeah, and then towards the end of the day you kind of catch up on some things and try to make a goal of not taking work home. I've never been able to be successful about it but that's kind of the goal. So I'm a little early-riser, late-leaver. I don't advocate that for others.

**Q:** Were you here early that morning; that Tuesday morning?

**RADM Brown:** Yeah, as a matter of fact that was a very fascinating day. I think everyone clearly remembered where they were. I was in - it was about six o'clock in the morning - and over my shoulder there is a chart on the wall and if you open the frame behind the chart you'll see a television. So I have a routine of coming in in the morning . . . our building is on a timer so the lights are on and off at six and six. So if I'm in before the lights are on I go over there. I turn the lamp on. I turn the TV on, and while I generally change clothes and get myself mentally organized I'm watching TV and listening to the things. And so I was watching . . .

**Q:** Do you listen to the radio coming in in the morning?

**RADM Brown:** I listen to the radio coming in in the morning.

**Q:** But you hadn't heard anything?

**RADM Brown:** I hadn't heard anything. It was the television that, when I turned it on, it was the first hit. And so I'm saying, as I think a lot of people probably said at the time, what a tragic accident.

**Q:** It's amazing how psychologically we've changed since then.

**RADM Brown:** Yeah. And then the second one hit and I think I knew, and everyone knew, this wasn't an accident. Then the next thing that happened was my phone rang and I got a call from [Rear] Admiral [Vincent E.] Smith [USN] who's Navy Region Northwest here. He's the person responsible for the Northwest support of the naval assets here. His call to me was simply, Erroll, send us everything you have.

We had the two advantages. One; we had been working with the Navy earlier on Force Protection because of the [USS] *Cole* [DDG-67] incident. We had started back in January. Well following the *Cole* incident in November, December and January, we started meeting with the Navy to talk about what we could do in the region, so we had gone through some strategies and some force allocations. And so when September came around we were already prepositioned to

be prepared to respond to protect Navy assets, which in this area are really critical when you do a little bit of research in terms of the strategic assets we have here. So that was the first call I got from the Navy.

**Q:** Do you remember being in the office? It was fairly early, so were you here by yourself?

**RADM Brown:** Yes. It was early. I was here by myself. It was a day we had a trip planned down to Portland for fish. Fishing is a large industry here and we spend a lot of time involved in that. I was scheduled for a trip to go to a conference down there, and without a doubt that fell off the radarscope. That was cancelled immediately.

**Q:** Do you remember who you made your first phone call to after you hung up with Admiral Smith? Did you call your Chief of Staff or your Ops [Operations] Officer?

**RADM Brown:** My wife called and said, have you seen what's going? I said, yes, and unfortunately I said yes and kind of hung up the phone, because it was clear to me we had some things to do rather quickly. The Chief of Staff also has a bad habit of being an early riser and he was also recently arrived in the office.

We huddled very quickly and said, we're going to have to set up our ICS [Incident Command System]. I said, we had two advantages going for us. One was having worked with the Navy over months in terms of Force Protection for their force. Another one was, when I'd come aboard two years ago I emphasized contingency preparedness and had kind of doggedly gone about saying that there are things that we can plan on and there are things that we can only hope to be prepared for. So let's work hard on the things we can plan for but let's put equal emphasis on those kinds of contingency preparation things. And as a result of that we had ICS training. We had some other things in place and were able to stand up our ICS structure, including a Coast Guard Incident Command; CGIC, which is part of what you can see out of the window down here.

You talk about the number of assets we have available. Well we also have an MSO [Marine Safety Office] out here, a Group and a VTS [Vessel Traffic Service], and we were able to merge those seamlessly, practically immediately, to give that commander the forces he needed to begin to respond.

In addition to that we also recognized that we only had a small amount of boats and cutters in here for presence on the water. So we immediately began to survey our coastal stations to identify which assets they could afford to send up here, and it was very difficult balancing act. We said, first you have to self-protect.

**Q:** Yes.

**RADM Brown:** And then beyond that we need to provide Force Protection for other entities.

**Q:** What were some of your biggest concerns in terms of Asset Protection/Force Protection?

**RADM Brown:** I'm not sure I understand the question. First thing was self-protection.

**Q:** Right, just protecting Coast Guard facilities?

**RADM Brown:** Coast Guard facilities; self-protection, because at the time it was not clear what was the extent of the threat.

**Q:** Yes.

**RADM Brown:** So self-protection first. You asked, what were my concerns here? Well the Navy clearly catapulted to the top. And then after that, through our assessment from the MSOs; our critical infrastructure here. . . we also have nuclear hazards that we have to be concerned about here; power grids, critical port infrastructures, places that, if they were damaged, would interrupt the flow of commerce, goods and services. So that type of assessment was underway.

**Q:** This collocation of the Group and the MSO, it seems that all the District Commanders I've talked to say, that post 9-11 the "M" [Marine Safety] and the "O" [Operations] side of the house that were sort of moving back together over the last few years, is doing that even more so now. Is that your view as well?

**RADM Brown:** Well, again, sometimes you're lucky. Sometimes you're good. Sometimes you follow in the footsteps of good and lucky people, and the smart thing to do is keep going in that direction. And that was another case where we had also been strongly advocating that kind of combination. And while it wasn't sanctioned, we were looking for the opportunity to initiate a pilot that was supported by the PacArea [Coast Guard Pacific Area] Commander. So we were already starting to try to merge those; not only physically, but operationally. So we were a bit pre-disposed when the incident happened just to put it in place in that action manner. So we had two things going for us. One: our Incident Command Structure facilitated it, and two: we had already begun some preliminary work in terms of physically and operationally having those units work together.

**Q:** So there weren't any situations where you had a captain or a commander who was a Group Commander, or a captain or commander who was an MSO Commander, suddenly thrown together and deciding who's going to do what with what?

**RADM Brown:** No. I think that transition was smooth because of some of the preliminary stuff, and two other factors I would say. One is just the general nature of Coasties and the urgency of the situation clearly removed any of those types of barriers. But again, we were already in a good position. People were already working well together, so it was easy for us to just simply focus on the task at hand.

**Q:** Well you just gave me a perfect lead in, Sir, to only trick question I ask in these interviews, and I apologize in advance. I ask this of most of the senior officers. If every Marine is a rifleman, then what's every Coast Guardsman?

**RADM Brown:** Every Coast Guardsman's a lifesaver and I think that's where it all starts. It all starts with the core of our humanitarian service. This is the sort of thing that people come in to do. If not to save lives, to help in some fashion, whether it's with the environment . . . and so I think those kinds of things are the strong core about which our organization forms itself as a humanitarian service first and foremost.

**Q:** You and [Rear] Admiral [James D.] Hull [Commander, 9th District] are the only ones that gave that answer instantaneously; a lifesaver. Although [Rear] Admiral [James S.] Carmichael [Commander, 7th District], I think said humanitarian, so you're all in same ballpark. Do you remember talking to [Vice] Admiral [Ernest R.] Riutta [Commander, PACAREA & 11th District] that morning?

**RADM Brown:** Yes, we had a VTC [Video-Telephone Conference]. The day unfolded exceptionally rapidly and one of the things I'd asked one of our junior jaygees to do was get a sheet of paper and start writing this stuff down because you won't be able to remember what happened, and it helps us look back.

**Q:** Sure. You recognized right then that . . .

**RADM Brown:** Well you are what you were, and your experiences, I think, are built. And I was up in Alaska when *Exxon Valdez* occurred.

**Q:** Really?

**RADM Brown:** And I remember watching that huge wrestle, and one of the things was organization; who's in your charge of what? Who's going to do what? And just kind of the log keeping of decisions and issues that need to be captured. I don't know why I just made a mental note that at some point somebody will come back and ask you some questions and the logs will be the only place you'll have, because memory will be treacherous. And right now it's very difficult for me to emotionally put myself back then at that time. But at that time we got Blue Dart messages and everything that was coming out raised the anxiety. I mean everyone who was in a high building, the first sense was, why are we here? Lets . . . you know, we have planes landing here. We're in a tall building. It's a Federal building. Oklahoma [the bombing of the Federal building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, on 19 April 1995] had already happened. I mean the anxiety level was so high that it was just . . .

**Q:** Was there any thought of standing up your ICS somewhere else?

**RADM Brown:** Yeah. As a matter of fact that was part of all of our decision making process; that as we stood our ICS up. That we also needed to, at the same time, be prepared to actually go to the alternate site.

**Q:** Do you have an alternate site in your plans?

**RADM Brown:** Yes, we have an alternate site pre-established. So we took parallel action. We stood up our ICS structure and at the same time we established, and we also asked our ESU [Electronic Systems Support Unit] to help us wire out our alternate site. And in addition to that the Area Commander had immediately made available to District Commanders, Operational Command and Control Platforms within their AOR [Area of Responsibility]. As you look out the window you can see we have 378s and icebreakers, out here. So at my command I had as a platform, the Command and Control cutter; a 378, which gives you a lot of flexibility.

**Q:** Yes.

**RADM Brown:** At the time you weren't certain who had control of what. You didn't know when the power would go out.

**Q:** Sure.

**RADM Brown:** You would not be able to communicate, and what type of general street chaos might happen. I mean you sit here today and you look back and you say, well why would you have street chaos? Well you have to have been in the moment when everyone . . .

**Q:** This is Seattle after all.

**RADM Brown:** . . . when everyone is trying to get home, to go to where their loved ones are.

**Q:** Right.

**RADM Brown:** And that was probably the first tension. For me, when I got my people together, it was Command and Control and Communication. We have to be able to talk to our people. We have to be able to control our assets and our units. The second priority was to have all personnel

return to their base. You know, everybody back. Get back as quickly as you can. And there were tons of stories about people who couldn't because of travel and other things, but it's to reconstitute that immediately and establish Command and Control. And the third thing is to have the people take care of their families, check on their families. I mean we had to be very judicious about letting people go, but it's kind of the call to war. We need you here to do your job. Take a moment to check on your family and make sure they're okay, but we need you here. And so there were a lot of really, really difficult tensions, and there's some challenges about, well what is it that you want me to do, or, do I have to be here? You know, I mean it's a natural tendency to want to go home.

**Q:** Well I don't know about that, Sir. It's funny because you're the first District Commander . . . because I ask them all the same questions and it fascinates me what their priority lists are, and it's always struck me - and I've done about 50 interviews now - is [Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard] Vince Patton; the Master Chief. I asked him what his first concern was and he said, my daughter. And of course you ask some of these other folks and, oh, I was concerned with whatever; some operational platform or something. But it's heartening when I hear people whose first thoughts are, get their people in touch with their families and make sure that their home front is secure, and now we focus on the job. So I compliment you on that , Sir.

**RADM Brown:** Well you don't have their hearts and minds.

**Q:** What were your personal emotions that morning? I mean you're a senior officer in an American naval force. Your country is, essentially by eleven o'clock that morning or eight o'clock out here, you pretty much have a sense that you're under attack. Do you remember what your personal thoughts were, other than your concern for your folks and your family, and their families and so forth, but just as a professional naval officer?

**RADM Brown:** Well, again, like I say, it's very difficult to put myself back in the moment.

**Q:** Sure.

**RADM Brown:** But my recollection was pretty much as I said. The first one was "a tragic accident". The second one was, "my goodness, you know, what has been wrought here?" And then it became immediately kind of that parallel, of kind of war responsibilities; all of the things that you hope never happen but you should be prepared for.

**Q:** Yes.

**RADM Brown:** And at the same time the personal kind of responsibility. So it was a twin tower, unfortunately much like the Twin Towers in New York. So you fall back upon all of those things that you have been preparing for and at the same time you kind of, not make peace with it, but say that to protect my family I must do this. If I don't stand the guard, if we don't stand the guard, then who does? And so warriors must war so families can be free. It's just got to happen that way. So you prepare for war and you let your family know that this is what I'm prepared to do.

**Q:** Yeah. I want to go back over just a couple of things; first about the Federal buildings. You probably know that Admiral Hull had to evacuate his building because when that plane that eventually crashed in Pennsylvania, they turned around, I guess in the air there. They didn't know where that was going.

**RADM Brown:** Right.

**Q:** Was there, or is there, anything in the plans or thoughts that you could, if need be, go to a 378 and stand up your ICS?

**RADM Brown:** Yes. As I indicated, this was primary. We had a secondary one, which is down at the ICS, and the tertiary would have been aboard the 378.

**Q:** Yes.

**RADM Brown:** Now we had a lot of really good advantages in place. It's kind of like my issue about contingency preparedness. If you do it there are enormous benefits to it, that when it comes time to do it, it's too late to plan.

**Q:** Sure.

**RADM Brown:** You have to just do it. And we were, as you recall, coming off the heels of the Millennium; 2000, and so we had continuity of ops. We had basic continuity plans and so those kinds of things; contingency plans, those types of things were kind of fresh and we were able to use those as alternatives, and things that we were recently experienced with, including communications.

**Q:** Sure. Speaking of communications, I just wanted to go back to your first communications with your senior leadership; PACAREA Commander and so forth. Do you remember the character of those conversations early on? What were you looking for from them? What were they looking for from you?

**RADM Brown:** My two years with Vice Admiral Riutta have been absolutely exceptional. He has been unwavering in his support and just probably - not probably - the best boss I've ever worked for. So when he called us on the VTC it was simply a matter of asking us what we needed and making those things available. And like I said, the three 378s; the cutters, being available were just an enormous asset to have.

**Q:** Yes.

**RADM Brown:** Asking us what we thought we might need from him and that our situation, he wanted us to give him, I think, hourly or two-hour reports on our situation. We, like almost all of the other ports, secured all the flow of traffic, which was probably the first dramatic thing that we did on the maritime side, which really wasn't that hard to do. Captains of the Port have good control of that.

We had a good relationship with Canada, which was an interesting element for us because we had that international element.

**Q:** Yes.

**RADM Brown:** And over the past ten or twelve years . . . and not just then, but as a result of our cooperative VTS system that has been in place for over two decades. And we, every six months we're back and forth. I've traveled up there numerous times and every quarter we're getting together, talking about the issues for the international traffic that goes in the Strait. Those kinds of long standing pre-established relationships; both personally and operationally, went a long way to us being able to secure the traffic.

**Q:** You have an opposite number up there that you liaison with?

**RADM Brown:** Yes.

**Q:** Yeah. Were you in touch with the Canadians that day do you recall?

**RADM Brown:** Yes. I didn't end up making a personal contact myself. We did at the O-6 level and we also did at the operational level; both at VTS and the MSO.

**Q:** How did things progress from there? Traffic was shut down. Were your priorities then identifying passenger lists and those sorts of things; cargo? What was your focus when it became clear that this was going to be something of a large scale Port Security operation?

**RADM Brown:** Well that's a great question. It's a fascinating question because there were just so many things going on at the same time. It was self-protection. It was reconstituting. It was establishing Command and Control. It was giving people assurance of their families and also their own safety. As you mentioned, we're here in a Federal building, so what makes us not a target? You know, we're in a tall building. It's a Federal building. So how do you tell people that we're not a target? And while all that's swirling around the Navy's calling us saying, we need your assets and you're asking the MSO to reconstitute itself as an Incident Command Structure and seize positive control of the flow of vessels in and out of the port, which is, in essence, to direct vessels to anchor if they're incoming, to have vessels that are inport stay inport. And then quote, unquote, decide, what are your priorities in the absence of other directions? And that was just a bunch of stuff that really happened very, very quickly.

Quickly ratcheting up the scale were classified communications; Coast Guard, Navy, and our normal capacity to receive and send those types of things was not something we were equipped to do in the moment, but we quickly had to stand up that capability.

So your question was, how could you establish the priorities to know what to do? The first one is: stop things, you know. Know what is where. Figure out which things are the highest risk types of things. Having watched on the TV screen, planes fly into buildings, the maritime equivalent would be huge tankers and other very, very large vessels just going anywhere into ports, into bridges and things like that. So that was the first effort to seize it, to stop it, and then make assessments as to what where threats and how would those threats be assessed.

**Q:** Yes. As a senior officer what did you look for - and not necessarily in operational or resource terms but just in terms of direction - attitude from your senior leaders?

**RADM Brown:** Well that's an interesting question.

**Q:** I know it's a loaded question.

**RADM Brown:** But I think everyone does it differently. I held a number of "All Hands" and there's one comment I made that I absolutely believe in. Well I guess I believe everything I say. But it was kind of, when you don't know what else to do, you cook. And with that expression goes - and it's embarrassing for me - because it's kind of a story I tell about my grandparents and having been raised in the country, and when everybody gets together to do something, you watch people. And some of the women would cook. Others would knit. The kids would play. The men would get together and talk around the truck and other kinds of things. But everyone kind of did what their experience base had brought them to be. And if you watch when people get nervous, some people will cook. Some people will knit. Some people will rock, and they kind of go back to that thing that they kind of feel comfortable and know how to do.

**Q:** It gives them a sense of security.

**RADM Brown:** And in fact it does contribute. When you cook, it helps, and stuff like that. So everybody has their part. So a long story short; for me it was more a matter of trying to consciously keep myself extracted, not in the events and the activities, but back from the events and activities, and watching them and saying, what's next? What's next? We need to establish communications. Give that to somebody. Don't sit there and get consumed by communications. Communications are important. So for me those were the issues that revolved around what it was; what have you seen happen in the past and how does that relate to this? And then, what's going to be next? And that's where the communications for me - having been in Hurricane Andrew and having been in the *Exxon Valdez* - that ability for someone whose not right next to you to have information flow and have that Command and Control. To me the most critical element was communication.

**Q:** It's a fascinating point. Another thing I try to ask all the senior leaders is: you're a two-star admiral. People don't react normally around two-star admirals or three-star admirals, four-star admirals and so forth. I'm wondering what your level of self-awareness is in these situations in the sense . . . the Military Historian, Paul Fussell, has a phrase something on the order of, the role of an officer is to seem what you would be and in a crisis you need to affect a certain attitude and hope that you'll be imitated. In other words, people can't see their leader running around like a chicken with his head cut off. They need to see somebody who's in charge. Do you have a conscious sense that you need to be a certain way in a crisis or are you the way you are all the time? How do you present yourself in a situation where people are clearly looking at you for direction, attitude and so forth?

**RADM Brown:** I agree that there is a merit and leadership benefit to exuding and demonstrating a persona. Again, you're kind of what you were. So I think I had some of the advantages of having much lower scale issues like being an engineering officer and having casualties, and having to get engines and things back up, and just that kind of environment that's circling you, and the operators and aviators and a lot of people have those kinds of environments surrounding them where things have to happen in times like that.

**Q:** Yes.

**RADM Brown:** So that calm in the crisis, that calm in the storm, I think, is absolutely essential. I frankly didn't focus on it a lot. I would say that part of it was the prelude; the buildup, the establishing of strong relationships where people don't fear you. You talk about how people react. You know, when you come in a room and everyone is back on their heels and kind of hesitant and speak because, you know, you'll hand them their head for a misspeak or a failure to have a reference exactly right. So to me that ramp is established in advance and so when you're in the room you have the relationship. You're beyond that. So it's into the communications, the action in the moment. And so in that moment you do, I think, need to be the voice of reason, the voice of calm. It will be okay.

**Q:** But you have a sense, and did a sense then of, as you say, extracting yourself so that you could look at it more or less objectively and decide where to go?

**RADM Brown:** Right. This is hard. It's things like being there, being available, standing back, and people knowing where you are and they can come to you and you'll give them a short, quick, calm answer. That you're not there on the phone and doing this and doing those kinds of things, and everybody's huddled around you with the paper waiting for you to bark out the answers. That we have separated the assignments and responsibilities and given those to them and expect them to come back to us when they need us or when they need it.

**Q:** Did you participate in any of these flag phone calls back and forth with Headquarters?

**RADM Brown:** Not that I recall. What I recall is getting our information from PACAREA; Vice Admiral Riutta. And again, that's what I would call an exceptionally strong relationship. I mean it was just comforting to talk to him.

**Q:** Yes. Did you look . . . you've talked about him. Do you look at the role, or study, even in a professional sense, the way the Commandant conducted himself in those first few weeks and how he directed the movement of resources and so forth throughout the Coast Guard?

**RADM Brown:** I was consumed. I was consumed within our AOR. I was consumed within assessing the threat. We always had the potential to be called upon by other agencies and those are some very difficult decisions to have to make. So it was establishing a new operational structure on the fly at the time and using the resources that were available. So your question was, what was my view of Admiral [James] Loy? Where we were we got support. We weren't questioned. We were given latitude. We weren't constantly asked for information at the time and in the moment.

**Q:** Yes.

**RADM Brown:** And in retrospect that was probably the thing we needed most.

**Q:** Just to have them stay out of your way and let you do your job.

**RADM Brown:** Support us doing our job.

**Q:** Yeah. I want to shift a little bit to your life since then. What has changed as your role as District Commander since 9-11? Well let's just start there, and I've got a couple of questions to follow up from that as well.

**RADM Brown:** Well philosophically I think your life is based on what you believe. And so for me it was really being consumed with the event. And from my perspective, recognizing the nature - having been a War College graduate - it's kind of drilled into you - know the nature of the war. And this is not a traditional classic force on force and that's fundamentally different. You know terror is part of it. Striking soft innocent civilian targets, no conscience, and no restraint. I mean that's so profound and different that it almost defies strategy. But if that's what you believe the nature of the war is, then it guides how you act and how you prepare. And frankly there is really no . . . too much is not enough in terms of resources when you say, well how do you respond? Do you protect everything everywhere? Do you become a fortress America?

**Q:** Right.

**RADM Brown:** Well those aren't my issues to answer, but anything that happens in the 13th District my phone will ring, so I have to figure out what to do and how to do it. So we quickly migrated to what we would consider a vulnerability and risk. And so if something happened what were the worst consequences, and so that migrated up over to the Navy, and then we did basically the same thing around here for the port. But more profoundly than that it's kept, for me, a conscious and consistent concern about where we are and what we're doing. If you look back at 9-11 that wasn't the first time for the Twin Towers. The *Cole* wasn't the first time. And so what you see is a very, very insidious, a very resilient, and a very determined foe. One whose is more than patient. One who constantly, asymmetrically assesses you and waits, and so, to the extent you go, huhhh.

**Q:** You're going to get whacked again.

**RADM Brown:** Right. And so for me it's been . . . you can see me sitting here patting my foot right now.

**Q:** Have you been waiting for that other shoe to drop?

**RADM Brown:** No, I'm not waiting for the other shoe to drop.

**Q:** I don't mean waiting in the sense of just waiting around for it.

**RADM Brown:** My view is time is equally dispersed to all of us, and as it is a potential for my adversaries, it's also an opportunity for our allies. So what is it that we are, in fact, doing? Are we, in fact, raising the security bar? Are we, in fact, doing these kinds of things? So that, for me, has been kind of the constant issue here and I took an extra effort to write to my commanders and challenge them and have them respond to me in writing about their assessment of the nature of the war.

**Q:** Yes.

**RADM Brown:** Because I thought to the extent they had that right, it really structured what was done and how it was done. So what it makes it is a relentless preparation.

**Q:** That's fascinating. I'd love to get a copy of that message. Do you feel confident that the bar has been raised here in the 13th District in terms of security for whatever asymmetric threats or whatever?

**RADM Brown:** We're doing more than we were doing prior to 9-11. I tried to paint a picture of a very open, very mobile maritime structure that emphasized rapid movement of goods. Containers are classic examples. But compared then as compared to now; yes, more is being done. But I think the real question . . . I think the real relevant evaluation is compared to the vulnerability gap. So if this was a gaping vulnerability that existed before, then where are we now? So what needs to be considered . . .

**Q:** Yeah, the gap.

**RADM Brown:** . . . here and you have to ask yourself, is can you protect all of that.?

**Q:** One of the threats that were sighted most often after 9-11 was somebody sneaking something nasty into a container into a port. Do you have nightmares about these things? Just driving along the docks here I see all the containers you're dealing with every day. Has this been something that's been discussed a lot here in Seattle since then?

**RADM Brown:** Third largest container port. Yes it has. It concerns me, us.

**Q:** Can you talk a little bit about the nature of the Coast Guard's liaison role with, say, shipping companies from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and so forth, and all around the Pacific rim? Do we have direct contacts with them in this effort to push out the maritime frontier?

**RADM Brown:** Well I would say it's a tiered system, like most things. So for us it is local, and I think in terms of local interaction it is absolutely outstanding. I think that it's pretty much typical for most MSOs and Captain of the Ports that they're well integrated into the local maritime community. In terms of a long standing relationship its kind of a push/pull, love/hate kind of, you know.

**Q:** Sure.

**RADM Brown:** When was the last time you embraced your regulator? (Laughter) But having said that, I think we're well versed in the perspectives and the nuances and implications of the business. So that's local/regional. And there's a national perspective.

**Q:** Sure.

**RADM Brown:** For us we kind of call it Coast Wise to the extent we're doing things different here. You know it tilts the playing field and that has economic implications. So we only have a certain amount of latitude in terms of what we think we can do because of the national and the coast-wise framework of costs with all the independent elements that are out there, and there are things that we do that potentially may nudge or drive economics here or in Vancouver that are just practically indifferent.

**Q:** Yes.

**RADM Brown:** And so what you do here may end up causing people to go other places. So it's regional, which I think local, I think is outstanding. The national, which brings on some other structure, and then you talk about pushing the borders out. That clearly becomes international, and our voice in that is much more restrained and much less vocal, and we have to pass those issues up to IMO [International Maritime Organization]; Coast Guard Headquarters, and begin to speak as a nation and an international one. So locally that's very hard to influence.

**Q:** You have kind of a unique position in that you were involved with Andrew and with Valdez. Where would you put 9-11 in this lineage of events that have affected the Coast Guard?

**RADM Brown:** You know it's one of the things you get asked to do a lot is give your opinion. And that's one of those kinds of things where my leg is patting and I'm saying, you know, it's important to do. It's valuable. But I have a lot of homework to do. You know as the guy says, the saying; "There's a lot to do before I sleep. The mountain's wide and the valley's deep." And so that's how I feel is, you know, when you look at the chasm and how we're addressing it, that's the real work to be done. But your question was, how does 9-11 fit in with these others? I would say if you looked at the Coast Guard, you know, they're the marks. It's kind of like the rings on the trees and you look at what's happened and you can tell by archeology. And so we've had Vietnam, which marked our service. We had mass migrant operations, which affect our organization. We had the drug wars, which brought a different layer to the Coast Guard. We had *Exxon Valdez* in the eighties, and this is going to be a significant resurgence of Maritime Security. So it's almost in ten-year decrements that you see these things happen that fundamentally change the nature of our Service, and that's how I see it. [Hurricane] Andrew was kind of a localized experience as it relates to the Coast Guard, but in terms of the Nation it gave us much better forecasting. I mean that's what Andrew did.

**Q:** It set a new precedent.

**RADM Brown:** And it stepped up FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] too. It changed FEMA's role.

**Q:** Right.

**RADM Brown:** And you see FEMA kind of going through the same kind of organizational fit issues here, and that's not part of the interview. But *Exxon Valdez*, ten years later, is still having its implications rolled out and I see the same thing. *Achille Lauro* affected the cruise liner

industry. *Exxon Valdez* affected the tanker fleet industry, and TSA [Transportation Security Administration] and the Twin Towers, and 9-11's going to affect maritime commerce. You already see it in terms of pushing out the borders, in terms of non-tamper seals for containers, inspections, and all those kinds of things in transit visibility, and all those kinds of things; identifying workers on the dock, biometrics and all those kinds of things. But I guess when we talk about know the nature of the war and the nature of the enemy, we are trying to do something with technology that you could never do with technology and that's look in the hearts of men. Technology won't do it for you. It'll help, but it won't solve.

**Q:** I want to give you a chance to add any thoughts that you have from where you sit on what's happened in the six/seven months since 9-11. Is there anything else you want to comment on, Sir?

**RADM Brown:** I guess I still continue to be anxious about the things that need to be done, and it's not something that is able to be addressed in isolation. The Coast Guard's part of a larger system in terms of our Nation, in terms of the will of the people, in terms of the resources that are put behind it, in terms of the beliefs as they relate to what it is that you believe you are defending against and how much are you willing to defend against it. It's kind of like people who get in planes don't believe the plane's going to crash. People who get in cars - though it's the number one killer - don't believe it's going to happen to them. So it's a matter of a belief system. Based upon your beliefs you act differently.

**Q:** Any closing thoughts on the last six months?

**RADM Brown:** At this point I guess I would leave it as kind of an open perspective because I have a lot of closely deep-held beliefs that have to be manifested within a larger organizational element. When we look at our nation's history and other nation's history, all actions tend to have a pendulum affect. Something very dramatic happens; Pearl Harbor, and you react. And so the pendulum swings back and forth and as times passes and nothing happens there tends to be a dissipation of real interest concern, fear, however you want to characterize it.

**Q:** Yes.

**RADM Brown:** And we had known about terrorism, and the bills that are currently moving through and based on bills that existed for a while. So it's not a lack of knowledge. I would say it comes back to our belief systems and our willingness, and that's what [Carl Phillip Gottfried (or Gottlieb) von] Clausewitz [Prussian Army officer, military theorist & author of *Vom Kriege (On War)*, 1832 ] tells us; it's the will of the people. And so that's where we find ourselves. So I'm able to demonstrate my personal will within a larger context. I want us to continue to be focused on doing what we can, do with the resources we have, focused on a clear recognition of the nature of the enemy and the nature of the war, insidious, and requiring our constant vigilance.

**Q:** Do you fear, or do you observe a dissipation of will in these last few months since this other big second shoe hasn't dropped?

**RADM Brown:** No, not really. I think there's a difference between I guess what I would call the public and the people on the watch. I think the people on watch are on watch and it's much like I talked about when we opened the Twin Towers with the warrior. You have to be willing to do what you know needs to be done, and I think those people on watch are more than willing to do what needs to be done. And they do it for and at behest of the will of the people. So I think the people on watch are at their stations, fully engaged, fully aware of what needs to be done, and doing it with every fiber of their being.

**Q:** Admiral, Sir, I want to thank you very much.

**RADM Brown:** Well this is completely different from what I expected. I appreciate the opportunity to give you my thoughts.

**Q:** Well most of the admirals say, they say, boy, I was so . . . it's hard to think of a Reserve chief making an admiral nervous. But they say, I didn't know what to expect out of this. But it was really painless when I got through.

**RADM Brown:** Yeah. Well I thank you, because I think what we'll find is that history will record significantly differently, what happened, and that's just the nature of the authors and things.

**Q:** Sure.

**RADM Brown:** We'll pull out the papers and we will look so well reasoned.

**Q:** Well I think one of the . . . what we're trying to do is, again, what the Coast Guard hasn't done in the past, which is talk to our commanders and our select unit commanders and people in those units while they're still in those billets. We don't talk to them when they're in those billets or afterwards.

**RADM Brown:** Right.

**Q:** And this is a chance to try to get them while they're still in that position and get their thoughts. I'm going to write something on the order of instant history, which is almost variably wrong. At least that's what most historians will tell you. But I think we came to the conclusion that it was important to get something down because it was going to be lost.

**RADM Brown:** Yeah.

**Q:** And I can't tell you how many people I've talked to that say, well I think I was here that day, but I may have been there and I may have talked to this person.

**RADM Brown:** Yeah.

**Q:** And of course it's the nature of the event. It was this TV event for many people where they saw the same thing happen.

**RADM Brown:** Yeah. Clausewitz talks about the "fog of war." We're in and around all these things that are happening and, you know, say the thing is, hey, you're supposed to evacuate all Federal buildings. Is that a fact or is that not a fact? What is it based on? Where do we go? How do we get the word out?

**Q:** Right. Has there been any discussion since 9-11 of the efficacy of the wisdom of having Command and Control Centers in Federal buildings?

**RADM Brown:** Well it's an interesting question you should ask. I had an opportunity to speak to the crowd earlier and I kind of gave this Clausewitz bit; know the nature of the war and know the nature of the enemy, and once you understand that it kind of helps you. And so while we are doing what we think is appropriate . . . and we still have guidelines. We can't do everything we want to do because there's government business and other interests.

**Q:** Sure.

**RADM Brown:** I say, let me toss out an example for you that has business applications at stake. If you are, in fact, moving in a direction of centralizing, you're creating critical infrastructure nodes and those become more attractive targets.

**Q:** Sure.

**RADM Brown:** Maybe your future models will be decentralized, and I think that's a much better fabric when you begin to look at what's the continuity based on. I think continuity of operations is more able to be sustained in a decentralized manner, in a web network where you do something and that just affects the local thing as opposed to everything is here. Here is the critical node. You hit that.

**Q:** And everything else is shot.

**RADM Brown:** Right. So your question was, efficacy of that. You know the business model drive towards efficiencies and at the same time it creates vulnerabilities.

**Q:** Yes.

**RADM Brown:** In the past that hasn't been an issue, but I think, unfortunately, it's like a cancer. Once it's here it's going to be here among us. We have watched this happen every place else, and it's not always international. We have more than our fair share of domestic.

**Q:** Sure. I mean suppose another big operation comes along. What are you going to do about that?

**RADM Brown:** Let me make an even more critical comment. You talk about history and you talk about every Marine's a rifleman. I would say, look at that in the Coast Guard. We need to embed, better, our own history in terms of - and I know we have it in points of entry - but reinforce it. And so to the extent we do that, we have a history, we continue the history, and it's easier to add to the history. We, I believe, could do a better job of not only history but the preparation and educational stair-steps of all elements.

**Q:** It's *esprit de corp*. It's the basis of your *esprit de corp*.

**END OF INTERVIEW**

