



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

Interviewees: Rear Admiral Ralph D. Utley, USCG

Commander, 14th Coast Guard District

&

Captain Thomas D. Yearout, USCG

Chief of Staff, 14th Coast Guard District

&

Captain Steven A. Newell, USCG

Interviewer: PAC Peter Capelotti, USCGR

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Place: Office of the 14th District Commander

Q: It's May 16th and I'm in the Office of the District Commander in D-14; [Rear] Admiral [Ralph D.] Utley, and Sir, I just want to . . . I see you came onboard here in late June of last year as District Commander.

RADM Utley: That's correct; the 22th of June.

Q: So the bad guys didn't give you very long to settle in before you had a new set of problems. If you could just sort of give me a sense of what life was like for you in those first couple of months; what a typical day was in D-14 for you after you came onboard.

RADM Utley: Well as with any new job here you're pretty busy just learning about the District - and this is the first District that I've had command of - so it was a little different. So I was busy going through a lot of publications and asking a lot of questions, and driving the Staff generally nuts, I guess, as Admirals tend to do when they take over something. But it had actually settled pretty quickly. I was lucky enough to have a very senior staff that had been here and I was the only new person on the block so it made it real easy. But it was . . . to give you an idea, I was

used to being down in Miami. The first weekend I took over, the beeper went off maybe three or four times and I thought this is what the usual would be, and then Steve told me, oh no. This is a very hectic weekend. So the pace here was not that rigorous really. We don't have that many assets around here. So as CAPT Newell talks about you're moving a tarp around the football field trying to take care of anything that would happen. And we have a pretty good routine. There wasn't anything that was killing anybody. We were pretty well strapped because we don't have a great big staff here, but it was manageable. People worked normal type hours I would say until 9-11 came.

Q: If you could talk just a little bit to your own career progression before getting here.

RADM Utley: Oh, let's see. You know, after the Academy I did the usual weather cutter tour on a 255-foot cutter out of New London, Connecticut. I went to flight school in Pensacola then to Air Station Detroit. Then I went to Mobile, Alabama. I flew off of icebreakers; both North and South Poles. Then I was an Instructor Pilot for a couple years down there in Mobile. I went off to graduate school at Harvard and then up to Coast Guard HQ then North Bend, Oregon as the Operations Officer for a Group Air Station, so I served some time there. Then I was the CO at the Air Station at Brooklyn, New York. I went to the Air War College. I came out of there and became the CO of the Air Station in Miami. Just after I found the coffee pot there we had Hurricane Andrew, so I'm sort of used to having things turned upside down right after I show up. And then from there I was the Chief of Law Enforcement in the 7th District in Miami and was the Chief of Operations for a couple of years there. From there I was the Executive Director on the U.S. Interdiction Coordinator's Staff. That's a collateral duty the Commandant has for drug interdiction. I did that. After that I was selected for admiral. My first tour was on the Navy Staff running the Navy Command Center & Interagency Support Division, and then came out here. And I guess I left just in time because 14 of the people that worked for me got killed in the Pentagon when the airliner hit the Pentagon.

Q: [The Director of the Navy's Command Center & Counter-Drug Division (OPNAV N32), Rear] Admiral [Jeffrey J.] Hathaway would have been one of them that morning if he didn't have a . . . I guess he was on a senior service school selection board that morning.

RADM Utley: He was. Admiral Hathaway was my relief and we were real happy that he was at Coast Guard Headquarters on the senior service school selection board that morning.

Q: And you followed [Rear] Admiral [James S.] Carmichael?

RADM Utley: I did.

Q: You were here that morning of 9/11?

RADM Utley: I was in bed.

Q: Well you were in bed obviously. You were the first District Commander, other than [the Commander of the 13th Coast Guard District, Rear] Admiral [Erroll M.] Brown, who was sort of significantly behind in time zones, but you were even more so. Were you woken up in the middle of night?

RADM Utley: The Chief of Staff; Captain Tom Yearout, gave me a call, and I believe it was 3:52 in the morning and he asked me if I was watching TV. I said, it's 3:52 in the morning. I'm not watching TV. He said, you better turn it on.

Q: How did you find out, Sir?

CAPT Yearout: My son called me from Colorado.

Q: I know chiefs of staff never sleep, but . . .

CAPT Yearout: I was in the same situation. I was sound asleep. My son called from Colorado and we turned the television on, and as soon as I could see what was going on the first thing I did was call the Admiral and the Command Center to make sure that they were aware of it.

Q: Was the Command Center monitoring this?

CAPT Yearout: They were watching it on TV as it was unfolding.

Q: And you learned about it from the Chief of Staff?

RADM Utley: Right.

Q: What were your first responses?

RADM Utley: Well I said, okay. We've got to get the senior staff together at work. Meet me there as soon as you can be there. Then I immediately thought, now that's dumb! You don't want to go to a Federal building after somebody just blew something up. So I got a hold of everybody again through the Command Center and I said, let's go meet at Club Fourteen at Sand Island across the way at the CG base. So we all met and we started discussing the first things that we ought to do, like patrols, Force Protection, buckling things down, making sure that people don't come to work here. I closed the Federal building because I'm the designated representative. That's a generic name for . . .

Q: That's fascinating. You're the first district commander . . . every one of them has said, you know, we thought after awhile that we weren't in the safest place, but you're the first one who's instantaneously decided that was a bad place to be.

RADM Utley: I did. Maybe I had further to drive (Laughter). I had time to think about it. But yeah, we said, this is really stupid.

Q: Well [the Commander, 9th Coast Guard District, Rear] Admiral [James D.] Hull's building was actually evacuated when I guess the plane that had crashed in Pennsylvania turned around and was heading right back toward Cleveland, and they didn't know where it was going. So they stood up their Command Center and then had to stand it down almost immediately because that plane was heading toward Cleveland.

RADM Utley: Well we set up a CAC; a Crisis Action Center. It stood up right away. People came in with computers. It was amazing the way the Coasties can react. Everybody just takes their expertise and jumps in, because I certainly couldn't think of all the stuff. All the senior Staff were calling the right people and getting everything together. We were set up, ready to rock and roll, running the whole District out of Sand Island, probably by what, eight o'clock in the morning?

CAPT Yearout: Yes Sir.

RADM Utley: And we were doing it by cell phone beforehand. You mentioned in one of the questions about talking to the Commandant. I never talked to the Commandant. I talked to [Vice] Admiral Riutta; PACAREA [Commander], and we were going through, you know, basically doing the best practices; you know, what are you doing? What are your ideas?

Q: Were you on a phone conference with him with the PacArea commanders?

RADM Utley: Yes I was.

Q: Do you remember the character of those conversations? What kind of things were going back and forth between you all?

RADM Utley: We were just wondering, you know, have you experienced anything? What's the Intel there? What are you doing essentially? It was calm. I mean everybody . . . these are professionals who have been around for a long time and have been through a lot of stuff, and we just wanted to make sure that they were doing all the right things, and that our little puka was covered; in other words--the harbor. We wanted to make sure that things were done correctly.

Q: What were your biggest concerns that morning here in D-14? What kind of things did you want to lock down? Was it Navy Force Protection? Was it cargo ships? Was it passenger liners?

RADM Utley: The most important thing was the security and the infrastructure in the harbor. We weren't too sure. I mean the immediate thing wasn't passenger vessels or cargo ships or anything; what we've got coming in, you know, things like that. I wasn't worried about the Navy. This is sort of an interesting place because they have, since 1939 I guess, law enforcement authority; protective authority, out two miles from Pearl Harbor. They take care of their own Force Protection here. I think we've only done - correct me if I'm wrong - didn't we escort an aircraft carrier once?

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Yes Sir.

RADM Utley: And that was the only help that they had asked from us. I mean it's not like Adm Conway and I aren't talking all the time. As a matter of fact I took a tour of his harbor and we're working right now trying to figure out how to stop a rogue ship from coming in here that doesn't want to stop. We're working together, but as co-equals, as opposed to one supporting the other. We're finding out that we have the same . . . he found out he had the same problem we had after it really came to light; being able to respond in a short period of time.

Q: Were you in conference with him that day, do you recall, or when were your first conversations with the Navy? Did they call you to find out what you were doing and vice versa?

RADM Utley: Oh golly, it probably was a day before that happened. Here was the huge crush on this island and it didn't have anything to do . . . well it did have to do with Force Protection. But if you figure that the biggest employer on this island is generally the U.S. Military and all of a sudden you lock those bases down, you can imagine what happened to the traffic here. It just stopped. I mean . . . and then people trying to get to Tripler Hospital too. It just brought this place right to its knees. So we just kept all non-essential people from coming in. We opened the Federal building, what, after two days; whenever the President ordered us to.

Q: Yes.

RADM Utley: Because I was going to operate out of Sand Island for awhile because I figured, well, you know, they were attacking symbols of national power and what are they here? Well you could fly into the Arizona Memorial but that's been done essentially back during World War II. But I thought, well, you know, maybe the Aloha Tower. But you're trying to think, you know, it would have to be flashy, and so you're more or less worried about cruise ships and things like that.

Q: Well that's a good point. I wanted to . . . that's one of the questions I had for you is, a lot of analogies were made after September 11th that that was a modern generation's Pearl Harbor. You're here in Pearl Harbor. Was there much made of that?

RADM Utley: Oh yeah. Well they talked about it afterwards, but not particularly. You know, just stuff that you read in the newspapers; generally it was more people got killed, a possible attack on Pearl Harbor and things like that. But the thing that you have to realize is that even though we were five thousand miles away at the time, that this happened from Washington, DC or where anything happened, I mean you talk about symbols of national power. They hit the Pentagon. This, I believe, is either the second or third largest concentration of flag officers in the United States here. So I mean you've got Pearl Harbor; Hickam. You've got four-star generals and admirals all over the place; the headquarters at CINCPAC [Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet]; the largest Islamic nation in the world is Indonesia, and that's in this guys backyard. So this is serious business and we took this as if it would have happened right here.

Q: And your staff; what input were you looking for from them? I want to try to get a sense of what kind of things you were transmitting down to them and what kind of things were you looking for from senior leadership above you.

RADM Utley: Well I wanted ideas. Okay, let's think. I mean I've never said I was the smartest person in the world, but usually I've got smart people around me. And we were just trying to peel this thing back and say, okay, well what do you think we ought to do here? What is vulnerable? What do we have to watch out for? How about ourselves? Things like that. And we collaboratively went through it.

Q: Was this the kind of an analysis that was . . . obviously it's triggered by that day. But you had a kind of general sense of these vulnerabilities before then, or did you? I mean was this kind of a systematic PBA that you did prior to 9-11, or have these vulnerability assessments really become normal now since then?

CAPT Yearout: We have a District Risk Assessment Tool we use on a daily basis. We have been for some time. We were very much aware of terrorist problems and have worked closely with the local Hawaii Emergency Preparedness Executive Committee; HEPEC, which prior to them changing their name they were the Anti-Terrorism Strategic Executive Committee or something like that. But we were already working hand in hand with state, local and Federal agencies, and all of DoD on terrorist activities and how do we deal with that. Now we were somewhat in the early stages of that. We've progressed tremendously since then. But it wasn't a totally foreign situation for us with the [USS] *Cole* [DDG-67] incident and other types of things. Force Protection is a serious business here in Hawaii. All of the bases are pretty well sealed up. We have very few open bases that you can just drive onto. But those were the kinds of things we did on a regular basis I think. This obviously brought the tempo up and it focused all our resources towards this and pulled resources away from other mission areas and other requirements. I think that was our major focus, was that we had to reorient a lot of our activities.

Q: Do you have a sense of where you're, or recall a sense of where your platforms were that morning?

RADM Utley: Oh yeah. [USCGC] *Jarvis* [WHEC-725] was getting underway for a counter-narcotics patrol. We asked that it be chopped to us, and she was out here.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: And there was some discussion on what exactly should we direct *Jarvis* to do. And at that point it was just, don't go very far away. Stay within, I think, a hundred miles of what we directed them to do and be ready for whatever we might ask.

Q: There's a sense, I think, that a Coast Guard cutter carries a different connotation than say a battleship or a frigate; that it has a more reassuring sense. Was there a sense that you needed to keep it close by for that?

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Just close by in case we need it and we weren't sure that we might need it.

RADM Utley: The Navy sortied much of their ships here and they integrated with *Jarvis*, and we were trying to get a common operating picture of anything that was coming or going. And the *Jarvis*, with the law enforcement ability, and it had a rather large gun, and they were underway, the problem we talked about before that we face now, without having a large ship here, is trying to stop somebody that comes in that we don't want to come in. I wasn't worried about that then because I had *Jarvis* out there that could do it.

Q: Yes.

RADM Utley: And then of course we had all the patrols here. But we did wicker up with the Navy here and we had the same common operating picture, all, but not nearly as sophisticated, because we don't have all the secured connectivity that they do, but we worked very closely with them.

Q: Is that an issue that has come to the fore since 9-11?

RADM Utley: Absolutely.

Q: Have any suggestions or proposals been floated back and forth from this District as far as how you'd like to see that connectivity in the future?

RADM Utley: Oh yeah, SIPRNET terminals should be at all the MSOs [Marine Safety Offices]. We should have connectivity at the Group. The Group ought to be able to talk secure to a ship or an aircraft at long range. And I think that we're . . . this wasn't rocket science. Everybody figured that out about the same time. And so it was just the blinding flash of the obvious, and it's into the budget process right now.

Q: How is D-14 set up with this whole issue of collocations between the Groups and the MSOs? Do you have a unified command or do the "M" [Marine Safety] people sort of operate separately than the "O" [Operations] people? How does that work here?

RADM Utley: Admiral Riutta, before this had happened, had asked me to look into combining the MSO and the Group. We used this, as a matter of fact it's a virtual activity right now. There's a planning proposal that, hopefully, by tomorrow will be out of here, to combine the both. The Group actually works for the MSO. I've got MARSEC [Maritime Security], which is essentially the same thing in Guam, where there's an MSO in the Operations Section there of Marianas Section, are right in the same place. And then we're redoing the District staff along those lines so there will be one division instead of two for "M" and "O". So we're putting this all together. We found that it was dysfunctional. I mean the Captain of the Port guy had the authority. The other guy had all the toys, and it would be nice to put all this stuff together and have it work together. We already have only one Operations Center. We put that together immediately and that's the way that we're working.

Q: It was surprising coming on active duty finding out I had to explain writing this history that sometimes the Coast Guard has to liaison with the Coast Guard to get across the harbor.

RADM Utley: We use this as an opportunity.

Q: Did 9-11 sort of - I don't want to say expose – but sort make plain that that had to be done?

RADM Utley: Yes, to me it did. It sure did.

Q: How have you observed this during your career? I mean it seems they sort of split in the early Seventies and now they're coming back together.

RADM Utley: It's been something I thought was a good idea for a long time. When they were talking about streamlining they kept asking everybody for their ideas on how it should be done and that was, well, it was one of mine. And even in Miami where you had these huge commands, it just seemed dysfunctional. So they sort of ad hoc'd it with streamlining. Moved out of . . . there were two Federal buildings in Miami. We moved the MSO out of the Claude Pepper Building and co-located them with the Group. So now the COs were literally in the same hall, and a lot of those synergies were taking place. Well right here, I mean, it just didn't make any sense. And besides, it was really easy to do here because the CO of the Group is a commander, the CO of the MSO is a captain, so they don't have to worry about who works for who. This is not going to be a problem.

Q: Who's the senior of equals, right.

RADM Utley: Exactly. So this place is just an excellent laboratory for doing something like this.

Q: I have to ask you this, Sir. When did you find out that your neighborhood at the Pentagon had been hit?

RADM Utley: I found out right away. I mean it was on TV. I looked at it and they kept saying it was the Army side, and I said, huh, the Army's on the first two floors there. The Navy's on the other. I said those are my folks. And of course you couldn't find out. I mean there was no way of telling.

Q: Did you find out subsequently whether any of your colleagues personally had died?

RADM Utley: Yeah, I did. I sure did. My number two there, that had worked for a long time and came back as a civilian, was killed that day. His name was Captain Jack [D.] Panches [Jr., USN (Ret.)]. You may have seen some articles about him.

Q: Admiral Carmichael mentioned it to me. I think he said that he gave the eulogy for him.

RADM Utley: He did. If I could have come back I would, but I couldn't do it. There was no way I could have done it from here. It was too far. I would have had to have been away too long and at the wrong time. But yeah, he got killed. I mean young lieutenants with babies, things like that. It's just unbelievable.

Q: You're a senior officer in one of the Armed Forces. How did this attack affect you on a personal level and how did you feel about it when it happened?

RADM Utley: Well you're not allowed to feel anything to start with. I mean you've got a job to do, but it's personal, I guess is what I'm saying. I think it's for real and I don't think we can afford to put down the pack. We can't afford to take our eye off the ball. I mean this is a long-term thing and if they have the ability to whack us again they will. And I think we've got to root them out and kill them before they do it.

Q: Do you sense a danger of people; the general public, for letting this fade into the past?

RADM Utley: I see a danger of the Coast Guard letting it fade into the past. I think with this Reserve drawdown - I know it was mandated by OMB [Office of Management and Budget] and the Administration and stuff like that - we thought we had a bridging strategy. It was going to take three years. We were counting on having the Reserves there for three years. People are looking around . . . I think you've got to shake people every once in awhile and say, this is for real. It still is, and we're not going back to the way it was on the 10th of September. So the Administration has done a pretty good job of trying to keep that said about the Reserves. I can understand the political implications on having Reserves on active duty for an extended period of time. Others have been made aware of . . . we drew, as the percentage, more . . . we recalled more Reserves than any other Service.

Q: It took me six weeks to get that number Sir. I don't know if it would surprise you to find out we had 984 Reserves on EAD [Extended Active Duty] on September 10th. So when the Reserve mobilization was at its height we had something like 2,704, I think that were mobilized after. So when you put those numbers together it adds up to something like 47-percent of the Reserve. So we essentially had no Reserves after about October 10th. We were using it all up.

RADM Utley: One point I do want to make. It's sort of a . . . you haven't brought it up. Actually Tom was the one that brought it up. I had it easy here and the reason was because nobody is resource intensive around here. Nobody has a lot of stuff except DoD and the State. The Civil Defense is run by the TAG; the Adjutant General here. He's double-hatted to do that. He's Hawaii Defense and Civil Defense. He runs that. He's one of the members of that HEPEC that we were talking about earlier. You know, we're sitting there on a conference call on a daily basis and the District Commanders are talking about having to reach out to these people and talk to these people. I was not exchanging business cards on the 11th of September. We knew each other. We already had the forum together to deal with this. We didn't have to stand up anything new. They stood up a JRAC; Joint Rear Area Coordinator, and that happens to be a three-star Army guy; the head of USARPAC [U.S. Army Pacific] to coordinate some of this stuff, but it's all under the same auspices of this HEPEC thing. Again, we already knew what we were doing. Not only that, we had another advantage. DTRA [Defense Threat Reduction Agency] had already done our port here and the other big one that I've got at the harbor in Guam. I mean I had this stuff. So we had a competitive advantage I guess. Things were pretty well nailed down there.

Q: Is that because of the military nature of Hawaii to begin with?

CAPT Yearout: Partly because of that and because it's a small compact group of people I guess. We only have one state to deal with. There are only, what, seven counties in the state? Most states have 50 counties and you need to deal with each one of their civil defenses if you're going to organize something on the statewide level. It was much simpler to do that here. Plus we are vulnerable to hurricanes and to tsunamis. The Civil Defense organization here was well structured and well utilized and exercised. Every year we exercise for hurricanes, statewide.

Q: Were a lot of those procedures just easily transferable to this situation?

CAPT Yearout: Yes, because it was the same group of people. It was the same organizations that we were talking to; the same methods we were using to communicate. One of the first things that they started looking at was, we talk a lot but we don't give you all of our classified material, and that's something that we worked out arrangements for; how do we share classified information, especially intelligence information, about threats and things like that with the local community? And we made some very good progress in those kinds of things. But the State of Hawaii is - being an island state - it's very dependent on a lot of key things. One of those we found was the air traffic coming and going from here. The State of Hawaii did not, at that time,

have laboratories for testing the blood supply. People were donating blood but they couldn't use it because they couldn't test it to determine if it was good. The method for testing it was they would take the samples and put it on a commercial airline and fly it to Seattle and they'd test it there and then call back the results. The Coast Guard wound up flying that blood supply over for them so it would keep those kinds of things going. But that is just indicative of how inter-dependent we are with each other here in the islands, and that's been a major advantage to us because, like the Admiral said, there were no introductions to be made. It was pick up the phone and call the people that you know and you deal with on a regular basis.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: The Admiral mentioned earlier too that we don't get a lot of cases and that the pace of activity is not real high, and that's true. The problem is, is the cases that we do get are wide and they're dispersed much more than any other place in the country. And since the number of cases is usually the driver in what kind of resources that you get - not just for the Coast Guard but for all of the organizations around here - nobody is over resourced. And so we've developed this interlaced network of sharing resources and responsibilities; calling on each other to pick up the slack in places that we're short. The state calls on us. We call on the State. And those arrangements were all exercised and working properly, and we were light years ahead of our contemporaries in establishing that, even though the threat was as new to us as it was to them.

RADM Utley: We're going to digress a little bit and talk about SAR [Search and Rescue], but it's illustrative of how we do business out here in Hawaii, it turned out to be an advantage. Could you go through that SAR case where the Navy/Coast Guard/helicopter/fixed wing, and somebody else, and also talk about Guam; how that worked?

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Sure. Again, our AOR [Area of Responsibility]; SAR AOR, is enormous. It's really the whole Central Pacific from the islands in Guam, halfway to California; 12.2 million square nautical miles. And as the Admiral has mentioned, our resources are absolutely minimal. We have all of our airplanes stationed here in Oahu. Very few patrol boats here. One patrol boat in Guam with a 50-year-old buoy tender. So when we have SAR cases anywhere in that enormous area we have to be fairly creative, and through the years we've solicited the help of both DoD and commercial vessels, and I think that we're very well exercised in getting that help when we need it. And then the case that the Admiral mentioned was a fellow that, I think his affliction was, I suspect to be appendicitis if I'm not mistaken, on a commercial vessel hundreds of miles from Oahu. The Flight Surgeon evaluated his condition and felt that he needed to be seen immediately and administered some antibiotics if I'm not mistaken. And the only way we could deliver that - and it's probably a method that we use once or twice a year - we delivered a SEAL team from a Coast Guard C-130, and I mean that's pretty unusual for Coast Guard rescue cases, but we have that kind of relationship with the DoD. We mobilized the SEAL team. They're happy to do that. They jumped out of the back of a C-130. They've got their own small vessel. They approached the commercial vessel, got onboard and did what they needed to do. Meanwhile, again working with DoD, there was no Coast Guard ship available with a flight deck. We got a Navy destroyer underway from Pearl Harbor with a Coast Guard helicopter on the back, and while the SEAL team was being delivered to the vessel, the vessel is still coming closer to Oahu. The Navy ship went out. Our helicopter ended up hoisting the individual, with the SEALs, back to the Navy ship, I mean while the Navy ship, at full speed, heads for Oahu. When they're close enough the Coast Guard helicopter takes off with the fellow and he transfers him to a hospital, and we saved that life. A particularly complicated case that involved any number of DoD assets; ships, SEAL teams; amazing, but that's, as I say, maybe once or twice a year, but certainly not an unusual case for us to accomplish.

RADM Utley: Well what this illustrates is we never had to develop these relationships.

Q: Right.

RADM Utley: These are the same people we're dealing with after 9-11. So we weren't exchanging business cards. We worked at developing tactics, techniques and procedures on how to work together. We already had that. So we were pretty well set.

Q: You weren't exchanging business cards, but I guess this was a kind of national crisis for several weeks, and even around an institutional relationship people will evaluate personalities within that. Did you feel, as a new District Commander, that people were observing your actions and how you responded in this situation?

RADM Utley: I never considered that; never considered it.

Q: Do you have a sense as an officer that you, in a stressful or crisis situation, that you need to appear like an officer?

RADM Utley: I'm good at that, okay. I don't get shook up. So, as a matter of fact, I like adrenalin. I mean it keeps me going. And I love being in Hawaii. I love the hurricane stuff. I love that stuff.

Q: It's almost word for word what I got from [the Commander, Atlantic Area, Vice] Admiral [Thad W.] Allen. I asked him that same question and he just laughed. He said, just ask my Chief of Staff. He'll tell you I'm the same person every day. (Laughter) Well let me ask you gentlemen then. Well I probably shouldn't ask you this in the presence of the Admiral. In your career progressions do you look to your senior leadership, whether it's the Admiral or other seniors that you've worked with, to behave or act a certain way in situations? What do you look for in a senior officer when the shit hits the fan, or do you? Do you just look to your own AOR or do you look to senior leadership, whether it's the District Commander, the PAC Area Commander or the Commandant?

CAPT Yearout: I can tell you that I sat in on a lot of phone conversations and video conferences with the PacArea Commander and so on and so forth, and that is part of what you look for is the leadership to show, okay, we've got a vision of where we're going to go. We know what we need to do. We've got problems. We're going to solve those problems. Here's the action to take. It was very obvious that throughout the chain that we had that leadership there. That's the strength I think that the Coast Guard brings to crisis management. It's the quality of our people and the leadership that we have.

CAPT Newell: For the group of people that were here, as we dealt with that in the subsequent weeks, I think we functioned pretty well as a team with each of us specifically looking at our parochial interests and then knitting that together under the Admiral's leadership in trying to adjust the global issues. Each one of us had assets and problems at the time, and rather than hoard them and say, well I'm taking care of my problems. I hope yours work out okay, we were able to push all of them in the general direction and Admiral Utley was the one that kind of steered that process. Our role in this was to identify the threats, identify with the responses that we had available to us, and we brought them forward and he prioritized them into a joint answer from the District.

Q: I think it was in Pub #1 [the Commandant] Admiral [James M.] Loy said something like, a Coast Guard officer can go through his whole career without knowing what the other half of the Service does or what other parts of the Service do. And I just wondered if you, as senior officers, have a chance in your careers to sort of . . . do you look at Commandant by Commandant? Do you study what they do, how they run the Service in those sorts of issues? Do you have time professionally to do those sorts of things, or is that something that's completely outside of your realm, or outside of your radar screen?

CAPT Newell: It doesn't affect what I do day-to-day, no. But certainly the way that the Service is leaning and how they address those problems affects us, absolutely. I don't have time to keep bringing rocks up forward, so anytime that I can narrow down the rocks that are available we'll do that. If we have an obvious trend and an answer is just not going to work, whether I believe it or not, it's not an issue anymore. Slide it to the side and let's work on ones that can be agreed on and ones that we can get concurrence on.

Q: And you Sir?

CAPT Yearout: I think you always look at the senior leadership and evaluate where they are taking the Service. Is that where I would be going? But like Steve says, you have to be realistic about this. A lot of us didn't like the idea of streamlining but that's where we were going at the time, and we did our very best to try and make that as reasonable as possible. I think it's much more than just looking at each Commandant. I think most people in the Service evaluate the entire Flag Corps, because those are the leaders that they deal with on a fairly regular basis. And especially when you get down to District Commanders, to Commanders at the MLCs; those kinds of things, that's the one individual that people throughout that organization look to, to provide them leadership.

Q: Do you have a sense that we had, for lack of a better phrase, adult leadership? I mean I've interviewed the Commandant and he's sort of a towering figure physically as well as intellectually. Did the senior officers have a sense that there was an adult in charge of the Service at a time of crisis?

CAPT Yearout: There was never a doubt. I don't think that was ever a concern that our leadership didn't know what to do. It never even entered our minds. More importantly was, we know what we need to do. We know how to get there. The problem is, can we get the resources that we need? Do we have the resources immediately available? And I'll give you an example of that. This is a relatively small district. The staff is pretty thin and in a lot of places we're one deep. My two senior Division Chiefs were not present on 9-11. Captain Newell was on leave in Florida and couldn't get back. Captain Rice, Chief of Marine Safety, was on TAD [Temporary Additional Duty] in China and couldn't get back, so two of my top players were gone.

Q: Was he with [the Assistant Commandant for Marine Safety and Environmental Protection (G-M), Rear] Admiral [Paul J.] Pluta and his group?

CAPT Yearout: Yes. So I don't think there was any problem at all with the leadership in the Coast Guard. The problem that we have in the Coast Guard is having adequate resources to utilize the talent that's available through that leadership. Because you can be the best leader in the world, but if you've got nobody to lead . . .

Q: What did 9-11 do for the Service? We were going through a 15-percent cut a year ago that's now been rescinded. We've got supplementals and so forth. Did this change fundamental the character of the Service in terms of resources?

RADM Utley: I think it changed the character of the organization fundamentally as far as resources are concerned. I don't know. The jury's still out. We've got a lot more money. Like it says, you know, we went from a five billion to a seven billion dollar organization, but that's mirrors and pulleys. It had to do with accounting stuff. OE [Operating Expenses] increased 773 million I guess. That's where you try and look, and we brought back the 15-percent that we had lost.

Q: Yes.

RADM Utley: Yeah, I think we got more respect. I think the challenge now is, since we don't have a FYDP; a five-year budget, and we're on a three-year build, it's going to be harder for us than anybody else to keep people interested in this homeland security stuff. And yeah, we're really important. I mean, yeah, we'll give you all the security you can afford but we're going to have to grow.

Q: A lot of other Districts stood up Maritime Homeland Security Offices. Some of them put a Reserve captain in charge; someone with law enforcement experience. You had these relationships already. I mean was that something that was never on your scope as far as having to do that, or . . . ?

RADM Utley: No, that wasn't necessary. The OLE [Office of Law Enforcement] did it from the Op side and a couple of folks over on the "M" side, they just worked together to get through the planning, because the data calls were just amazing. It wasn't the people with their laundry on their head coming over in the Federal building or anything like that. What we had . . . it was one data call after another, and it was like, how else do you want me to look at this, and, oh by the way, is it in the budget even now?

Q: That's why I'm here in your office this morning, Sir. We tried to make this seem not like just one more data call on your e-mail.

RADM Utley: No, this is sort of fun.

Q: I want to just sort of start to round this out by asking you where you would fit this in – I mean you've been a Coast Guard officer for three decades plus - where would you fit this in in the lineage of Coast Guard events in the past 30 years that you've been through in your career? Is this as significant as Mariel [Boatlift] or [Exxon] Valdez, or how do you view this now with a little bit of hindsight?

RADM Utley: It's the biggest thing that's ever happened. It's bigger than Valdez. It's bigger than Mariel. We haven't done anything like this since World War II. This is, once again, highlighting how the military portion of our character is really, really the bedrock about which Service is the maritime, multi-missioned military and I think we're back in the game.

Q: That is a perfect lead in, Sir, to the only trick question I ask the flags during these interviews. If every Marine's a rifleman, what's every Coast Guardsman?

RADM Utley: A military, multi-missioned, maritime individual. We cannot be characterized that way. We defy characterization that way. Admiral Loy said, if it's dangerous and it's wet, it's ours. There you go.

Q: That fascinating. You're the second admiral who has given me that same response. Two of them have said lifesaver. One said humanitarian. And now you're the second to say military multi-missioned maritime professional.

RADM Utley: We are humanitarian. That's one of our missions; only one.

Q: It's really is a fascinating Service in that it is this kind of amoeba that kind of has to do 20 different things and has to do them all well and has to do them with five minutes notice when something happens. And in terms of the District where have you seen this event? I imagine it was pretty quiet around here for a few days with no air traffic. How have people in the District, people in the Service here in the District, come to grips with this over the past six months and where do they see this taking the Service in the future?

RADM Utley: I'd like to think the same way that I just characterized. I don't know. Let me ask some of the folks here, because we've been trying to . . .

CAPT Newell: We're still trying to come to grips with it. We got a tremendously under resourced position handed to us with no relief from the missions that we had before.

Q: Yes.

CAPT Newell: We're still trying to figure out how we're going to do . . . we were behind to begin with and it hasn't gotten any better. The Admiral referred to my tarp analogy before. Well my tarp just got smaller. You know I've got a football field and a 10 x 10 tarp and I'm trying to move it around, and I'll be okay until it rains on too much of the field and then I'm not going to be able to cover it. We got more rain as part of this mission and we need a bigger tarp, otherwise I'm kidding folks that we're actually going to be able to cover all of these things. So we keep going after whatever the priority is at the time and doing the best that we can, but we're wearing people out doing that and it's not a good long-term strategy. It's a good short-term thing; initial response, but we can't afford to let it become our long term strategy.

Q: As somebody from an outside perspective, I always thought captains could get whatever the hell they wanted just by pounding the table. (Laughter) Does the Coast Guard frustrate you in the sense that you know what you need but you can't get it?

CAPT Newell: Well we have some sense of what we need and the fact that we can't get it. We've almost taken a perverse pleasure in being able to do everything with nothing. We have this corporate culture that it makes us say, Aye, Aye immediately and then go, how am I going to do that? Well we're in that phase now and this is far too important for us to just be silent and say, somehow we'll find a way. So it's kind of gone against our corporate culture to be putting our hands up and saying I need more of this. But as it becomes more obvious how important this is and what the stakes are, we will overcome that, and we are putting our hands up and saying, we need more of this.

Q: Is that a culture shift that you've seen since 9-11?

CAPT Newell: It's a culture shift within my community that was on its way before 9-11, and got accelerated variably at that point. And we continue to say we need, we need, and it's frustrating to sit at the end of the pipeline and not see much coming out.

Q: How do you feel about that, Sir?

CAPT Yearout: I think my major concern is, yes, this has completely altered our Services in the way of doing things. But the Admiral . . . I think one of the terms he used was, we'll give you all the security you can afford. And when I look at the requirements for making our ports secure, the requirements for making our airports secure, the requirements for making our borders secure at the bridges and so on between our countries, and then you look at INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service]. You look at all the different things that are necessary to really make us a secure nation without significantly changing our whole construction, this country can't afford it. And something is going to give. We're going to do some things better than others. My concern is not that we won't prioritize that and make the right decisions, but that people will get the impression that we are secure here, but in fact we're secure over here maybe at the airports but we're not in our ports as yet, because we haven't solved our container problem. We haven't solved the issues with facilitating commerce and still maintaining that type of security. I think that's going to put the Coast Guard in a very uncomfortable position for a long time. I think, like the Admiral said, the jury is still out on what resources are going to be available and how well we'll be able to do the things we'd like to be able to do.

Q: I think you're right, Sir. I think, well for months everybody was waiting for the other shoe to drop. And now that, well Anthrax may or may not have been it, but since the big shoe never dropped everybody's sort of gotten back into their secure mode and said, well nothing's going to happen.

CAPT Yearout: And it's coming.

CAPT Newell: And adding to our dilemma is that the more successful we are, the quieter things become.

Q: The less people think they need us.

CAPT Newell: Yes. How do you tell if you've stopped a terrorist attack? Nothing happens.

Q: Right.

CAPT Newell: So we can be highly effective and that undermines us in the cry for resources. But failing at losing one of these facilities is not the way that we want to get more resources.

Q: Right. Well the Coast Guard seems, historically, to flow these mission sets dujour, whether it's oil clean-up or migrant interdiction or wherever there was a lot of money, offshore law enforcement; that sort of thing. You seem to be suggesting that we're already sort of backing off this. We know we've got this enormous mission, but all of sudden when people realize it was going to be an expensive mission, they're saying, well maybe we don't want to do all of that and the Coast Guard's going to be thrown back into that traditional role of having this new mission set without the resources to carry it out.

CAPT Yearout: And that's fine as long as we don't tell everybody that we can do this. And the idea, like Steve said, that we're raising our hands and saying I can't do what you said with the resources you gave me. That's becoming more and more important for us to do that. It's hard to do.

Q: Are the flags, in your view, are they comfortable putting up their hands and saying that now?

RADM Utley: Yes, I think so. Yeah, right from the very top. Historically we think small. We see a large price tag on something and we gag and say, well we can't ask for this much, and we trim things down to an unacceptable level internally before we even ask for anything. That has to stop.

Q: It's time for a Commandant to say, we're going to do something, not because it's cheap, but because it's expensive.

RADM Utley: Yep, and we have to sit there and say this is the price tag and we're going to do this right. And no, we're not meeting MARSEC One. We're not there yet. We know how to do it. Here it is. And if you can afford it, fine. If not, you're not going to get the security. And as far as the Flag Officer Corps, we've got our backs up enough to say, you're not getting it. I'm not going to tell you that this place is safe, because it's not.

Q: Let me ask you to just sort of wind up, if you had any final thoughts or other thoughts that you'd like to share about the last six months; how it's affected you career wise, District wise and so forth, where you put this into your career?

RADM Utley: Well it's like I said, it's a sea change for the Coast Guard. We were up to our eyeballs in fisheries and migrants here. We haven't done much of that. We're just getting our first fisheries patrol right now; getting back to doing some of those things right now. If the American public is going to want the Coast Guard to continue to do the missions at least at the same level we were doing it on the 10th of September and do maritime homeland security, the Coast Guard has got to get bigger.

Q: Is there, at some level, that migrant interdiction, drugs, fisheries, as well as anti-terrorism and Force Protection, can all be looked at as border security issues?

RADM Utley: You know that's pretty tough. You're in danger of casting security in too wide of a net. I refer to arguments on both sides. Well it's not that nothing is National Security, but everything is not National Security.

Q: Right.

RADM Utley: It's pretty tough to do that. I think that we're pretty safe saying some of these missions definitely aren't national security. But others would argue that drug trafficking is not. No one is going to argue that homeland security, as we see it, that is certainly a matter of national security.

Q: Anything you want to add Sir?

CAPT Newell: I would say certainly in the District I think it's that, clearly, some of the Coast Guard missions that we had been enforcing before 9-11 were so far away from the State of Hawaii . . . I mean the majority of our law enforcement was protecting fisheries and EEZ's [Exclusive Economic Zones] that are surrounding tiny atolls that the U.S. happens to own as territories.

Q: Yes.

CAPT Newell: And I think it would be a pretty hard sell to say that that's got anything to do with National Security. Perhaps in some of the districts of the mainland they can do that. But our mission is to be able to send C-130s half way across the Pacific to see if foreigners are taking our fish and that doesn't have a whole lot to do with National Security.

Q: Right. Gentlemen, I'd like to thank you very much for your time. The Army, when they have a significant operation, they send folks like me and they put up the little tag outside the office: before you leave talk to the historian. So I want to thank you very much for your time.

RADM Utley: Yeah, I hope this program continues. We need it.

END OF INTERVIEW

