

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: Vice Admiral Ernest R. Riutta, USCG
Commander, Pacific Area & Eleventh Coast Guard District**



Interviewer: PAC Peter Capelotti, USCGR
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Q: Let me ask you before we get started on 9/11; if you could sort of encapsulate how you came to be in Alameda on 9/10, what your career path was like and the assignments that you think led to you being PACAREA [Coast Guard Pacific Area] on 9/11.

VADM Riutta: Okay. Well I'm a surface operator by trade. Most of my time was in the Pacific. I'll just give you a quick thumbnail of where I went. My first unit was out of Hawaii, an old weather ship. I went from there to a patrol boat in Monterey. I went from there to a LORAN Station in Vietnam. I came back to a buoy tender in the Great Lakes. I went from there to Activities Europe. I went from there to a buoy tender in Alaska, starting out in Adak, then Kodiak, and then I came to Juneau as the Aids to Navigation Officer. From there I went to a 210 in New England; out of New London. I spent some time on the fishing grounds and in the early days of the marijuana wars where we were up to our eyeballs in drug running, and that's when we were actually winning the marijuana wars in those days. Actually we did win it I think. It's very clear. But they shifted cargos. From there I went to Headquarters where I was in Officer Assignments; over in CPA [Public Affairs & Community Service] for two years and then onto the National War College. I went on to command a 378 starting in Boston, changed ports to San Pedro and came back up here on fisheries patrols and on counter-drug patrols in the Eastern Pacific. I went back to Headquarters and became Deputy Chief of Operations. I got selected for flag, came to the 17th District in Juneau for District Commander. I went back to Headquarters, was Chief of Operations for three years, then came to PACAREA from Headquarters. It was the place I wanted to go. I have most of my experience in the Pacific, and being a real "blue water" area if you will, it was the place that I probably had the most qualifications for.

Q: Sure.

VADM Riutta: So that's how I ended up here. I'm a 378 sailor, a buoy tender sailor, Alaska sailor and Pacific sailor. I know the turf out here. So this is my home, and I'm from here. I'm from Oregon.

Q: Are you?

VADM Riutta: Yeah.

Q: From the Coast?

VADM Riutta: Yeah, I fished and grew up in Astoria.

Q: Is your family a service family?

VADM Riutta: Only during the Second World War. No, we're not traditionally service . . . my dad and all of my uncles served in the various Armed Forces but that was all during the Second World War.

Q: So it suffices to say that you don't have a three-star admiral in your family somewhere?

VADM Riutta: No, I'm the only officer in my family.

Q: It's kind of, I guess, a minor historical footnote that I just found out about a week ago when I saw Paul Scotti's book [CWO4 Paul C. Scotti, USCG (Ret.), *Coast Guard Action in Vietnam: Stories of Those Who Served* (Central Point, OR: Hellgate Press, 2000)] that both our Area commanders on 9/11 had also both been LORAN commanders in Vietnam.

VADM Riutta: Yes, [Vice Admiral] Thad Allen [Commander, Atlantic Area & Fifth Coast Guard District] was in Thailand and I was in Vietnam right around the DMZ.

Q: Yeah. When I interviewed him we were talking about the Commandant's [Admiral James Loy] Vietnam experience and he made some self-deprecating joke about, well I saw combat in Vietnam too. Every time one of my guys wouldn't pay their bar tab the bartender would come down and start shooting up the LORAN station. (Laughter)

VADM Riutta: My LORAN Station was at the mouth of the Perfume River in a very hot zone in Vietnam, so they shot a lot of things in our neighborhood.

Q: I got that impression from Scotty's book.

VADM Riutta: They shot things up, but they didn't do it because we didn't pay the bar tab. (Laughter)

Q: Well you had, and I don't understand electronics, but there was this . . . he describes as keeping the Servos on line when they started a B-52 bombardment.

VADM Riutta: Yeah. We were in the northeastern tip of the LORAN chain that provided the grid for all the bombing, in the A Shau Valley into North Vietnam. And the bombing was close enough to our station that our timers, if they shook too hard, would trip, and if you could reset them within 45 seconds or so, which you had to do manually, then the bombers didn't lose lock. If they lost lock they had to abort the mission and go back

Q: Yes.

VADM Riutta: So the first wave would come in and you always knew there was another wave or two behind them. So the guys coming in were totally controlled electronically, and that was kind of amazing. You think how many years ago that was that all the bombing into the A Shau and in the north were controlled by electronics.

Q: Was that something that you could see or feel or hear from where you were?

VADM Riutta: I mean we could see the planes go over and feel the ground shock.

Q: So you've had decades of experiences as an officer and then a senior officer for a U.S. maritime service. I guess by 9/11 there wasn't a whole lot that surprised you. Do you remember where you were that morning?

VADM Riutta: Yeah, very clearly. I was just getting up . . . the Command Center called and the watch said, turn on your television. A plane just hit the World Trade Center. And about the time I turned my television on the second plane went in.

So I was home at Quarters "A" on Yerba Buena Island and I'm watching this, and that surprised me. I had expected at some point we would be attacked by terrorists. We've been predicting that for years. As a matter of fact I had originally scheduled a war game at Monterey in June that had to be postponed and we eventually held it in November, which we had tried to get a lot of sponsorship for and were not very successful. But at least CINCPACFLT [Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet] was onboard with us, and we were going to do homeland security scenarios all along the West Coast in anticipation of having to respond to some sort of a homeland attack of some type. I didn't expect anything along that order of magnitude, or the World Trade Center.

Q: So you had a mobilization exercise or a schedule or a plan for June that you had to put off until November?

VADM Riutta: It was an actual war game at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey that we were going to bring all . . .

Q: I think I've got some paperwork on that, yeah. Did you call the Command Center back when the second plane went in? I mean how did things start to spin up in the PACAREA? Where were your first phone calls to and who did you talk to?

VADM Riutta: Well it was right back to the Command Center. Of course by then they were thinking it was a terrorist attack, and so we got hold of the Chief of Staff and the Chief of Ops and said, we'll need to start standing up the CAT [Crisis Action Team] immediately. All the other District Commanders were doing the same thing. We got on the phone and asked them, what are you doing? We're standing up our Crisis Action Team. Then we got together and we started sorting out what we were going to do next over the course of the day.

Q: What was your relationship like with your other three District Commanders before 9/11? Are these people you have known for quite a while and you were on a first name basis, that sort of thing?

VADM Riutta: Yes, every one of them. I've known them almost all my entire Coast Guard career. Again, every one of them was a familiar name, a familiar face, people I trusted, people that I knew that could get the job done, because my job as an Area Commander was to push resources to them and not to tell them how to take care of their ports. Then my second hat as a District Commander was to make sure that we were doing what we needed to do in the 11th District.

Q: You say they were standing up their Crisis Action Operations in each District. What kind of things were they looking for from you, or were they looking at you as a resource broker and saying this is what I need?

VADM Riutta: Well the first thing they were looking for was intelligence. That was the big gapping hole that we had. You know, what's going on? What are the threats?

Q: Is that something that a District Commander would do in a crisis, would look to the Area as opposed to say resources in his own District?

VADM Riutta: Yeah, because the Area has the Intelligence Center.

Q: Okay.

VADM Riutta: That's the "PIT" as we call it; the PACAREA Intelligence Team. The Intelligence Center is the go-to place for all intelligence, and we have a pretty good team that's pretty well wired. So we were the point of intelligence flow to the Districts but it was a huge problem. There wasn't much coming in so you didn't really know what to put out as a threat. Everything's a threat; air, surface and land. So without a defined threat you've got to try to defend against all things and you can't do that. So what we had to do immediately was we had to start doing triage, you know, what's the greatest impact? So what we did was in the first few days, if not the first few hours, is we just kind of went through, okay, what is it that we want to prevent; massive loss of life, massive disruption to the economy, weapons of mass destruction incidents. I'm not trying to be cavalier, but everything else is expendable in the initial stages until we get it sorted out. So that's how we began to set our priorities on what we protect and what we don't protect.

Q: What were your biggest concerns on 9/11, specifically in the area as a whole?

VADM Riutta: Our major concerns were ships carrying hazardous cargo coming into our ports and cruise ships. A cruise ship is another World Trade Center. You know, look out here in that harbor.

Q: This is a mess. I've never seen anything like that.

VADM Riutta: Each one of those ships has anywhere from two to four thousand people on it.

Q: Like a city coming into the docks.

VADM Riutta: Exactly. I mean they're bigger than any of the hotels in town. So protecting a cruise ship, which is very difficult to do if somebody's got it already targeted, was one of our concerns. Fortunately we were beyond . . . out here we were in the after-cruise ship season so we didn't have a bunch of ships cruising around in Alaska. So we only had a few to be concerned about. Primarily the trade going into Mexico from Southern California and the trade that was still around Hawaii, which was very small. So it wasn't a huge problem for us. Our biggest concerns were the hazardous cargo carriers and critical infrastructure, which is why Sea Marshals were borne very early in the game. You know it was, what can we do, what can we protect with what we've got, and we didn't have a lot. So it wasn't like we had scads of people to turn too. Everybody was busy. Everybody was already overworked. Most of our resources in PACAREA are deep draft. You know, the big 378s and Icebreakers. Our harbor protection resources are minimal and our ability to pull small boats in to beef those up is also minimal. So we started to kind of triage, what are our threats based on? We have nothing else so we'll think like a terrorist. One of the first things I did was I grabbed a Reservist and brought him onboard and made him my Red Cell. His job was to think like a terrorist. Every time we come up with what we think is a good idea for security, tell us what's wrong with it. And so he started on the staff and then he eventually started heading around to the various places. He's an old PSU [Port Security Unit] commander, you know, terrorism expert, and really, I think, helped us focus on what are the high threats. We didn't have scads of patrol boats. Most of my LEDETs [Law Enforcement Detachments] were deployed; one team in the Persian Gulf, three or four teams out, and I only have one group down in San Diego to turn too. So we didn't have a lot of LEDETs that we could muster up, although we grabbed the TACLETs [Tactical Law Enforcement Teams] that we could and brought them to the ports that we needed. We immediately mobilized the Reserves. We put both PSUs on-line instantly in Long Beach and in Seattle, which was the only source of resources we could go too, and we did that without authorization. Though the Secretary [of Transportation Norman Mineta] gave us authorization very quickly. But I just called the Commandant [Admiral James Loy]. I said, Boss, I've got to do this, and he said, do it and I'll get the permission from the Secretary. And so we immediately called the Reserves to duty.

Q: You were doing that, say that morning?

VADM Riutta: It was within the first day or two at the latest. We had PSU 311 and PSU 313 on-line before we had Secretarial approval. But it was, you know, we just knew that it was a formality of that coming.

Q: Was there . . . I mean I did my first three years in MSO [Marine Safety Office] Providence with a port security unit and then when the Berlin Wall came down they said, well, we don't need you guys anymore because there's not going to be a general war in Europe. So go home or find another job.

VADM Riutta: Well we learned a very important lesson on 9/11 in that we had been basically demobilizing our entire Port Security structure over the past ten years or so and there was virtually nothing left. Most of the MSOs, none of the MSOs had any capability of even talking secure, much less handling classified material. You know the first day or two after 9/11 we had communications folks driving around with STU-IIIs in their cars handing them out to MSOs so we could just talk secure to them.

Q: Yes.

VADM Riutta: We had been in the process of taking the weapons away from all the MSOs guys. None of them were qualified to even use a gun. So that presented some serious problems when you tried to go out and do boardings with these guys. I said, we're going to have armed boardings. Well guess what?

Nobody can shoot straight over at the MSO, not because they don't want too. It's because all of their weapons are gone. Their qualifications have all lapsed. So we had to immediately stand up the range at Petaluma around the clock and brought Reservists on to do that. I started running people through so that we could use them in an armed capacity to go onboard the ships.

Q: Was this a matter that was discussed amongst the senior leadership over the last five or six years, that this capability was sort of dwindling away?

VADM Riutta: Yeah, it was on and off. It had been discussed a number of times. And I know from having been in the "O" side of the house that we were very concerned that we were losing our weapons capability. The downward trend had been halted but it hadn't been turned around yet because it was the function of not enough money. You know we'd been going through streamlining. Streamlining kind of put us in the "where do we cut", and of course everybody said, well there's no real threat so, or there was no defined threat, so whack away at that. I'll keep some of the other things on line. When you're forced into that kind of extremis you don't really have . . . if you haven't been attacked lately nobody wants to hear about I need more money for port security units and all that, but in hindsight that was pennywise and pound-foolish. We're paying for it big time right now.

Q: 9/11 clearly exposed the stripping away of the port security units. But were there other similar types of things, as an Area Commander, that you found that you would have liked to have had that say an Area Commander ten years ago would have had, or 15 years ago?

VADM Riutta: Oh yeah.

Q: You mentioned small boats and so forth for instance.

VADM Riutta: Oh we had small boats. We had people. We had weapons-trained people. We had drills. We had plans for security. None of that was in place. We had a bifurcated organization where the MSO had grown almost totally independent of the Group in many places. Now we on the West Coast were in better shape than most because we had Activities San Diego. And Group MSO LA/Long Beach but it's really an Activities command. MSO San Francisco and Group San Francisco already working close together. The same is true in Honolulu. The same is basically true in Seattle. There was no issue in Alaska because Valdez was strictly a single organization with no boats.

Q: You said with no boats?

VADM Riutta: With no boats, zero boats.

Q: Coming on active duty for the first time . . . it was kind of a shock to me on how do I explain to the general public - who knows nothing about the Coast Guard - that sometimes a Captain of the Port has to liaison with the Coast Guard to get across the harbor because he doesn't have his own boat.

VADM Riutta: Well what 9/11 clearly demonstrated was the ridiculousness of that split organization. I doubt there are many people left in senior leadership, if any, that don't agree that the Activities Command along the New York model or similar to that model; like the San Diego model, are really the way to do business.

Q: Well I've been told more than once that if this was going to happen it was probably . . . it wasn't good that it happened anywhere. But if it had to happen it was good that it happened in New York where you had a unified command and a one-star in charge of it, with a port that big.

VADM Riutta: That's right. It could have been much, much more problematic in other places. Now having said all that I will tell you that the MTS [Marine Transportation System] initiative that we started a

number of years ago - although it didn't really gain any ground with the Department of Transportation per say - what it did do at the grass roots level was build up a lot of very strong partnerships within the port among industry and all the port players. So when 9/11 happened - at least I can only speak truly of the West Coast - but for the West Coast we were immediately turned to as the leader in the port; the acknowledged leader in the port. So in places like LA/Long Beach, for example, there was no question in anybody's mind down there who was the leader in that port, and they turned immediately to our Group/MSO Captain. The same was true in the port of San Francisco/Oakland. They turned immediately to the Coast Guard there and Captain [Larry L.] Hereth and Captain [Timothy S.] Sullivan became the points around which everybody rallied.

Q: So in case there was any balking, or might have been any balking about, say shutting down traffic or what not, then you didn't experience any . . . ?

VADM Riutta: Well there was a lot of concern. Now immediately, the first thing we did was, boom, we closed the ports, just locked them up, but we knew we couldn't do that for long; we had to get them open as fast as we could. So we recalled every ship that was at sea. We put everybody else that could do it . . . so we put a ship off each port to start conducting boardings of everything that was coming into our major ports. We're fortunate here in that we have natural choke points; you know, LA, Long Beach, San Diego, San Francisco, Portland, Seattle and Prince William Sound. It's not like you have thousands of places big ships show up all the time so that there's a manageable threat. We were able to station cutters and put boarding teams out immediately to board everybody that came in. But it didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that this was not going to flush very long. So we had to balance that boarding procedure with keeping commerce flowing. That was the lesson we learned very clearly through the MTS initiative. MTS is a lot more valuable to us than a lot of people realize, simply because it built the partnerships . . . the understanding within, not just the Marine Safety, or the "M" community of the Coast Guard, but within the entire Coast Guard on the waterfront and the Districts, that, guys, we can't shut this port down. We have got to keep them moving, particularly in LA and those other key ports.

Q: Was it clear in your mind fairly early that that's exactly, or seems to be, one of the prime reasons why this was done, was to shut down the economy?

VADM Riutta: Yeah, that was a no brainer. When the planes were down you could see what was happening, and it was: we can't let this happen in the ports. So secure the ports to the level you can, but get the commerce moving as quickly as possible. And so what we did was we had the PSU mobilized down in LA and a tremendous partnership evolved down there which I'll tell you about in a minute. But what we did up in San Francisco where we didn't have the luxury of a PSU that we could mobilize, was we took ships; 378s that were already in port in Charlie status and we took their boarding teams and brought them out to augment the Group. We mobilized the Reserves as fast as we could and we started standing up . . . and we brought, I think we brought one TACLET up from San Diego to augment their mobilized PSU 313 up in Seattle, and we brought boats and crews in from the coast. But we knew that we had to keep commerce moving and we knew that we couldn't be boarding everybody ten miles offshore from the sea buoy doing lengthy boardings. You just hold everybody up too long. So that's when we came up with the Sea Marshals thing, because it was, what are you going to do given the threat? What's the biggest threat? And so we did a quick and dirty threat analysis of our own and said, look, what just happened to us? Well they took over several of our own commercial aircraft and turned them into weapons of mass destruction. How do we prevent that from happening on the waterfront? And so, you know, it's, could there be a nuke or a dirty bomb coming in in a container? Probably, it's a possibility. Is there anything we can do about it if it was coming? No.

Q: Probably not.

VADM Riutta: Okay. I mean that was the instant answer. It was no. We have no capability of finding it. Without any kind of intelligence we can't stop every container ship at sea and search 5,000 TUs to find out if the damn things in there, so we have to rely on intelligence to target those vessels that we have to do a full-blown strip search at sea on, and we don't have the resources to do this kind of thing any other

way. It's going to just totally disrupt the commerce of the West Coast and the United States. So what's the threat that we can do something about? Well we can prevent somebody from doing the same thing to us with a ship that they did with an airliner. So that's what we said. Put somebody on the ship to control the critical stations; the pilot house, the engine room and the steering gear, depending on the ship.

We also did a quick analysis with the California Highways Department to find out if a ship driving into something like the Golden Gate could bring it down, because when the bridges were built they were built to withstand an impact of the largest ship of the day. Well guess what?

Q: They're bigger.

VADM Riutta: They're bigger now.

Q: Yeah.

VADM Riutta: So that's when we came up with the Sea Marshals concept and the objective was to put somebody onboard that could keep someone from taking over at the last minute. Our analysis basically told us that, look, if somebody hijacks a ship at sea they're not going to stop and let us put a boarding team onboard. So having a boarding team standing by on a 210 or a 378 off the coast of California for a ship that's already hijacked, that's bound and determined to come in and do something bad in the port of San Francisco, we're not going to stop it. We're going to have to go to guns or do something else. So that's not going to help us. But if we go aboard . . .

Q: Would a 378 have the capability to sink a tanker if it had to?

VADM Riutta: No.

Q: So would it either be find another way to stop it, or bring in the Navy?

VADM Riutta: Yes, and we were working scenarios hot and heavy with the Navy and still are. But the answer is no. A 378 would be hard-pressed, if not totally impossible, to stop a large container ship or a tanker, even by shooting "HE" at it, unless you got lucky. So what could we do something about? We could do something about, you know, think like a terrorist. That's what our Red Cell told us; think like a terrorist. Okay, if I'm a terrorist and I want to take out the Golden Gate Bridge for example, or turn into Fisherman's Wharf and do something really bad, or turn into a LPG carrier - which come in and out of our ports all the time - how do I not tip my hat until it's too late for anybody to do something? Well I'm a member of the crew and I get to the bridge and at the last minute I cap the Pilot and the Master, put the wheel over, ring up full speed and run it into something. That was a threat we built the Sea Marshals to protect. They weren't ever intended -the Sea Marshal Program we started after this - it was never intended to stop or counter a group of active terrorists that had already taken over a ship. That, we felt, we had to go to Special Operations Command for help because we don't have that capability within the Coast Guard.

Q: To drop down a Strike Team and . . .

VADM Riutta: Seal Team.

Q: . . . take these guys on gun to gun.

VADM Riutta: That's right. That's the only way you can do that, and you'd have to do that at sea. So that's what we did with the Sea Marshals Program.

Q: It's a good point because I've heard this a lot, whether its PSUs getting firing authority and what kind of firing authority, and what level they're going to fire at, in say, an enclosed harbor, and just the whole issue of having guns on boats throughout the Coast Guard. Is there, in the very word Coast Guard, or words Coast Guard, a thought on the part of the general public that we can do stuff like that, do you think?

VADM Riutta: That we can shoot people?

Q: That we're the kind of organization we were in the Second World War. That everybody had a rifle. That we could land people on a ship if we had to and take it over.

VADM Riutta: Yeah. I think the general public still, up until 9/11 they'd forgotten that. But on 9/12 a lot of people remembered that and expected that we had that capability. And the fact of the matter is, we didn't. We had to rebuild it very quickly. We had some of it. I mean we had some degree within our TACLETs and within our larger cutters on their boarding teams. They had that capability. The folks who had been involved in counter-narcotics operations clearly knew what they were doing. The TACLETs that had gone over to the Persian Gulf . . . the PSUs were a tremendous strength for us. Bringing those folks on just, you know, that brought a level of expertise that had been lost from much of the active force.

Q: Did it come up to you at all . . . as I know this was an issue when I was in Gitmo [Guantanamo Bay, Cuba], this, unlike the Persian Gulf, this was a domestic emergency and a lot of our PSUs by-in-large are staffed by cops and firemen who at the very time they were mobilized to do Port Security are needed by their home fire department, police department and so forth to do their own anti-terrorism. Did that issue ever bubble up to your level during this whole last year or so?

VADM Riutta: Yeah, it came up a number of times. You know, when can I have my guys back? For the most part people that gave up their Reserves to us did so willingly, understanding that this is something that had to be done. And in the case of LA/Long Beach where we have just an incredibly good partnership with the Port Police, the Harbor Masters, the Directors, the Mayors of both Long Beach and Los Angeles, they actually ponied up police to work right alongside of our folks as Sea Marshals to escort ships in. They provided divers to sweep the cruise ships underneath to see if they were mined. A really incredible partnership that I think would be worth your time. I mean - I really do - to sit down and talk to John Holmes and some of the other folks down there and find out what came out, because the partnership in that port, I believe, is the standard for the way we ought to do things everywhere in the country.

Q: As the District Commander/Area Commander, is that something that you personally worked to foster?

VADM Riutta: Very much.

Q: Did you go around to these ports and meet with the Mayor and so forth?

VADM Riutta: Absolutely. I made a point of visiting the ports on a regular basis. I met with Larry Keller and Dick Steinke who were the Port Directors for LA and Long Beach. I called on the mayors. Even though I was the Area Commander I went down and spent a lot of time in LA and Long Beach because that port is so important to the country.

Immediately on 9/11 when I had to spend a lot of time as a resource broker and the Area Commander, I brought my Reserve flag on and made her the District Commander for California. And I'll tell you, that proved to me that we should never have gotten rid of the District Commander in the first place. I kind of suspected it when I got there because it was . . .and I'm trying to be an Area Commander, resource broker, looked long range, worked the multiple issues around the Pacific Rim, and then tried to focus on a District at the same time with a staff that was combined, which was really a hosed up organizational structure.

Q: Do you have a hard time, mentally, sort of compartmentalizing these things when you'd like to be able to look at things in a bigger strategic way?

VADM Riutta: Yeah, very much so. And on the 12th or the 13th we did an instant reorganization of the District and Area staff to fix that problem. We broke out the Area staff and organized them as an N-Staff; N1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. We combined "O" and "M" and said, N-3 - you know, no more "O" and no more "M" - N-3. Paired out the District staff, put the Reserve flag in charge and said, you take care of California. You Area guys focus on the area-wide coordination of resources, bringing forces to bear, working on the next plan; on the Intel flow, and all that kind of stuff. That worked very well. We still maintained a CAC [Crisis Action Center] for a while as a semi-battle staff, but we really evolved into a battle staff organization structure, because an ICS [Incident Command System] structure for a short term incident sounds fine. It worked well in the ports where we had all the players in, like . . .

Q: In the same room.

VADM Riutta: You know they had all their team; Coast Guard, INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service], Customs, Port Police, National Guard, whoever happened to be there were all part of their ICS structure. It worked great. For us what worked better was a battle staff concept where we could administer it to everyone. We didn't need an ICS structure at the Area command level.

Q: Right.

VADM Riutta: Because we weren't commanding a specific incident. We were really managing a series of incidents or potential incidents all around a region.

Q: If you could point to that as a senior officer, as a lesson learned, is that's something that you would recommend that they go back to; having a District Admiral in 5 and 11?

VADM Riutta: Certainly. Yes, I would absolutely recommend that.

Q: And 2. I guess [Rear] Admiral [Roy J.] Casto wants 2 back. (Laughter)

VADM Riutta: But yes. I would definitely recommend that.

Q: Is that all lumped with streamlining, why those combinations were made?

VADM Riutta: Absolutely, yeah. They were made exactly for that reason; to save billets, and they also needed to increase the size of the staff. I mean since the 11th District staff was brought down to essentially a minimal size and it was almost incapable of functioning.

Q: Is there any thought given to that in terms of any kind of bridging strategy to moving toward that in the future? I mean you've handed it off to [Rear] Admiral [Terry M.] Cross. Did you discuss this with him when he came aboard, that this is a bear?

VADM Riutta: Well he and I had discussed it when he was Chief of Operations prior to coming out, so he understood it very clearly, yeah. He understood that very well.

Q: So I guess it's a moot point to say that Port Security was on your radar screen on the 10th of September in a huge way, whether you've got the resources to confront something like this or not.

I'd like to take a bit of a different tack for a minute and just ask you, as a three-star admiral, that people look to you, or look to any senior officer, in a different light. When you come in the room - at least the rooms I've been in when a three-star admiral walks in - nobody is the same. They suddenly snap too and

everybody's on their toes, and I assume you have some self-awareness of that. Do you feel like in a crisis, which this clearly was, that when you enter a room that you have to be a certain way to sort of convey a sense of confidence to your Staff so that they in turn convey that down the chain?

VADM Riutta: Oh absolutely, yeah. You don't need to walk in with the answers but you need to walk in with, I know we can solve this. Let's figure it out. And then you need to make sure that people stay in their lane. Because what happens - and what I witnessed the first time I walked into the CAC where we had, it seemed like everybody in California was standing in our Crisis Action Center, because we had the District, the Area and all the MLC folks - everybody wanted to be part of the action. And we said, no, no. We're going to have to split the work up because we can't all be here seven by 24 because we're in a war now.

I think the other thing that you need to define is the terms of reference as a flag officer. One of the things that I said very early on and frequently is, it's no longer business as usual. We are in a war. We might as well get used to that term. Don't try to pussy foot around or beat around the bush. This is a war. We go to a wartime footing. We have to act and fight as if the enemy has brought the battle to us and we have to respond accordingly. So forget all the distracters that you might think. Focus on the battle at hand and we'll worry about the other missions later. Focus on securing the ports. Do that now. And, oh, by the way, during this war we still have to keep the commerce moving.

So those are our two priorities and we did that at the expense of all other missions to start with. And your familiar with the numbers, I'm sure; one percent to 57 percent. It may be even higher than that in some places. But you've got to focus on the mission *du jour*. You can't try to do everything you used to do and fight this new war too. And then it's a matter of going back and deciding when you have time later, decide where you're going to restore resources.

Q: Yes.

VADM Riutta: But for today there are only two things that we have to do. One; we still have to do search and rescue. We don't want Americans dying out there because we're busy fighting the war. The other thing is we've got to fight the war, because we don't know where the guys are going to attack next. So I guess to answer your question, to me, that was the most important job that I thought, as a flag officer, I could impart to everybody that worked for me, was understand the terms of reference. This is war.

Q: Is there anyone that you looked to in your career that you would say, that when I was on his staff, or that I try to emulate in one way or another? Do you have any role models either in or out of the Coast Guard?

VADM Riutta: Operationally within the Coast Guard the guy that I fell back on was [Rear Admiral William P.] Bill Leahy when he was the District Commander in Florida during the Haiti-Cuba-Haiti Crisis, and the way he took action. You know, he'd get things done. Don't sit there and think about it forever. Move; put resources on target. Go after, you know, figure out what your threat is and go do it. He was also my boss in Vietnam, so he was a combat veteran in that regard. But yeah, I reflected on some of the things that I'd seen him do, in D7. And I also reflected on some of the things that Jim Loy did when he was the Area Commander at the same time, and the way that he didn't get in there and micro-manage his district commanders. He flowed resources to them and went and did the battles with the Navy, and the other folks, to get resources for them.

Q: Yes.

VADM Riutta: So those are the current guys that I thought back and said, hum, well when this happened in Florida it wasn't the same kind of a battle but it was a battle nonetheless. It was a major crisis. How did they react?

Q: Yeah, that was my next question is, when I interviewed Admiral Loy, it's clear that that guy's a giant, physical stature as well as intellectual stature in many ways, and you get the sense - with your reputation, as I've heard it throughout the service, as well as Admiral Allen who's a dynamo, and then you have Admiral Loy - it seemed to me that this was adult leadership time for the Coast Guard and the Coast Guard was lucky that the top triad were all adult leaders. They all had Vietnam experience and had long and distinguished careers. Did you look, in this situation, to Admiral Loy in kind of an abstract sense to study the way he made his decisions during this, or were you, by this time in your career, were you so accustomed to kind of the ways he made decisions that you experienced?

VADM Riutta: I had been Admiral Loy's Chief of Operations for two years before going to PACAREA. I knew what he thought. I knew how he thought. I had been with him every day talking through a multitude of problems and crisis, so I knew exactly what he expected of me.

Q: Yes.

VADM Riutta: So I didn't look back to see what he was doing or how he was doing it. I focused on my area, keeping him informed, and when he wanted a course correction he would tell me about it. So he convened regular, you know, we were on the phone a lot.

Q: Yes.

VADM Riutta: And we thought a lot alike, so I knew what he was thinking. I knew what he was doing in Washington as did Admiral Allen. Both of us had both worked for Admiral Loy for many years. So there was, I think, a mindset there that we knew what the boss expected and we went out and did it.

Q: Was there also a sense of . . . well before I get to that, these flag conferences that were held early on for a couple of weeks or up to a month, do you recall the tenor and structure of those? I've heard them described as a tremendous anthropological classroom those first few weeks as people were trying to figure out what their role was and what resources that were going to get, and what resources they needed and how well this was jockeyed together. What was your sense of those conferences?

VADM Riutta: Well because of the crisis in New York most of those conferences were focused on New York. That was the issue *du jour*. And so flowing resources up there or trying to keep people from flowing resources that didn't belong there. They were dominated by Dick Bennis and Thad Allen, as they should be, because that's where the actual crisis was. Our part was more, here's what we're doing to secure the West Coast Boss; boom, boom, boom, boom. Almost no rudder orders because we didn't need any. And that's true for the other coast too. Although the White House was interested in what was going on and the Secretary was interested in what was going on in New York. So Admiral Allen and Admiral Loy had more help than they needed on how to make the decisions there. From our standpoint on the West Coast there was a benefit of being thousands of miles from Ground Zero where we could focus - instead of responding to the crisis like LANTAREA [Coast Guard Atlantic Area Command] had to do, like [Rear Admiral Richard E.] Dick Bennis [Commander, Activities New York & COTP] and the folks in New York had to do - we had the luxury of trying to anticipate the next move and blocking it. Now were we successful? Well nothing happened. Was anything planned? I have no idea.

Q: Yes.

VADM Riutta: You know, you have no idea.

Q: That was one of my questions. You say you war gamed for . . . you bring somebody onboard who does Red Cell work for you and you try to guard against those things, but you've got a situation where 19 guys without guns were able to pull this off using everyday technology, and it's hard to know when you're successful, or if you're successful. But clearly if a ship was being hijacked or attempted to be hijacked you'd think that at some point you would know about it.

VADM Riutta: We have only one indicator that intelligence gave us that there was an effort that was thwarted and it was a cruise ship in Hawaii. And whether it was presence, whether they got tipped off because the Intel guys, or because the - I don't want to poke the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] because I'm not sure they were the ones - but somebody started pressing too early in the game. I don't know if you know the story about that one or not, but, and I really can't go into a lot of it.

Q: Sure.

VADM Riutta: But there was one highly probable, I guess more than just potential, case of what could have been a planned cruise ship hijacking out of Hawaii that didn't occur because good alert police work on the part of the cruise line people themselves alerted some folks of some suspicious stuff. Now other things that went on, who knows? You know, you really just don't know. There are no indicators that said that anybody has specifically targeted any specific thing.

One of our other missions though, and a very, very important mission that a lot of people tend to downplay was to reassure the public. The presence mission was so valuable in the early days of this particular crisis that I think a lot of people failed to understand how important that was. Helicopters in the air, small boats on the water, patrol boats running around the harbor. As a District and Area Commander I can't count the number of times people would see me in uniform at an event and come up and say, I feel so reassured that the Coast Guard is out there. I see your people on the water every day. I know we are safe. And that was really, really important to keep the economy from just imploding. You know the first couple of groups of Sea Marshals that we put on a cruise ship in San Francisco, the people lined the railings and cheered them when the ship tied up and they walked off the gangway at Fisherman's Wharf, and those are the kinds of things that people felt reassured. When we set the Sea Marshals up we did it with the pilots and as soon as we started to cut back the pilots said, man, I really feel naked out there. I really like my Sea Marshals.

I had a guy in San Francisco send me a letter, this guy ran an art shop down in San Francisco on the waterfront at Pier 39. He sent me this really nice letter and said, I just have to tell you, every day I see your patrol boat go by and my customers and I really appreciate it. We feel safe, and that's one of the reasons that customers are coming back to my shop. So, you know, it's an impact on the economy, impact on the psyche. It not only makes us feel a little bit better about what we're doing but it makes the public a lot more secure. And that was a huge mission; restoring our faith in ourselves.

Not to abandon this, but the thing we did was we put in random patrols. We went back to our Red Cell and said, okay, if you're a terrorist how do you beat us? He said, well, I study your habits. I find out what you've been doing and I look for your weaknesses. So we said, well, if we never do the same thing twice you'll have trouble studying our habits, and he said, exactly right. And so you then expose yourself through counter-surveillance or you go to a softer target.

Q: Right.

VADM Riutta: So we threw in . . . part of our strategy was random patrols. Nobody ever knows when the Coast Guard's going to show up, but a lot of presence, a lot of presence.

Q: Well the presence issue is huge. I've discussed it at length with several people from the New York area and with Admiral Allen and so forth, and a lot of people have said to me that having a white hull with Coast Guard - because the Coast Guard is sort of half military, half civil law enforcement and goes out and protects sea turtles as well as hunting down drug smugglers and so forth - it has a reassurance to the public, that say a Navy gray hull doesn't. You know a Navy gray hull shows up in the harbor and you know that you're on war footing and it's almost like a scary connotation instead of reassurance, whereas the Coast Guard has that and it's a valuable asset.

VADM Riutta: Yeah. Well bring a large cutter in and anchor right in the middle of the bay, all of a sudden - and put boats out or have helicopters flying - all of a sudden people go, okay. They do have this under control, and we can go about our business. People that used to complain about armed boardings on 9/12 were welcoming guys with guns. As a matter of fact they were asking, you know, why don't you, you know, where's your machine guns?

Q: Yeah. Is the gun issue settled in the Coast Guard now do you think?

VADM Riutta: I think so. I don't think we'll have to go through that battle again. But we don't have the right guns. And one of my big concerns in all of our harbors is collateral damage. You know a .50-caliber machine gun in the harbor is really . . .

Q: Not the right weapon.

VADM Riutta: I mean it looks good.

Q: It looks very scary.

VADM Riutta: And it looks scary, but that's the last thing I want to do is open up with a .50-caliber in a harbor. You need a different weapons suite and I know we're working on that, and including a good suite of non-lethals, because not everybody you shoot you necessarily need to kill.

Q: Right.

VADM Riutta: But you need to be ready to do that when the time comes. Armed helicopter are also something that I think the next generation will have to deal with. Because you don't need to be armed all the time but you need to be able to arm when you need to.

Q: Well my captain [Captain Jeffrey K. Karonis, USCG] was one of the first HITRON [Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron] captains when he was CO [Commanding Officer] of the [USCGC] *Seneca* [WMEC-906], so I've gotten bits of that through him.

VADM Riutta: Yeah. Well we've had some tremendous successes with those armed helicopters.

Q: Do you ever have time to study things like the *Achille Lauro* and did they ever give you case studies? If a bunch of bad guys take over a cruise ship my first three calls are, a, b, c. Do you have time to think about these things in an abstract sense before the actual event? Does the Coast Guard give its officers time to think?

VADM Riutta: No we don't. We send people to, you know, some people get to go to the War Colleges and those that go there do have the time to think about this a little bit. Some of the folks that are involved in the readiness issues and the operational aspects do think this through a little bit as part of their jobs. But the truth of the matter is, we're so under the gun to do so many other things, that until this became a threat, nobody had really thought about it to any great degree. We had, post-*Cole* [USS *Cole*, DDG-67] we had been thinking about it a lot in PACAREA and we had been thinking about it in Headquarters as well, but not across the board. There were only a few pockets that were doing it. But to answer your basic question, no, we don't. Unlike organizations like the Army who have a Command and Staff School for all of their middle grade officers who go out and they do these warfighting things and they think them through, our opportunities for post-graduate school are more focused on non-warfighting specialties, you know, business administration, those type of things; civil engineering, naval engineering and naval architecture; things that you come back with and immediately apply to a job, and for good reason. I mean there's a reason for this. But I think the gaping hole that we have in our officer corps is that we don't have

a command and staff type of college; a warfighting school, at all. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall everybody kind of thought, well, we're not warfighters anymore, or there was kind of split personality.

Q: Sure.

VADM Riutta: There were some of us that thought that we were still warfighters and other things, and there are some who thought we were just other things and we don't have to be warfighters anymore, which is why we started disarming our stations and took the weapons away, stood down the Port Security Units and all that because it was too expensive. Nobody's going to attack us. You know the war is over. Peace in our time. Life is good. Every generation goes through that mistake. We've had a rude awaking. We're not going to make that mistake at least for another 20 years, and then if nothing happens we'll probably go through this whole thing over again, and hopefully there will be some warfighters left to say, hold it guys. You've got to go back and do battle again.

Q: The problem with that is that the weaponry that's around the world these days; fall asleep for one night and you lose ten million people.

VADM Riutta: Correct, and now you've got to the crux of why intelligence is so important. You cannot defend everything. You can set a minimum standard. You can't defend everything. You must have a very aware public. You need to know what's going on off your coast. We don't. You need to know what's going on in your harbors. We sort of do but we don't know it very well. And you need really, really good intelligence that collected, fused and disseminated, and matched with local intelligence in order to give your local commanders a good threat picture. And I don't mean just the Coast Guard. I'm talking about the state, the city police, the local cops, the captains of the ports and the FBI. That needs to be done and fused regularly, and we are moving in that direction. It's going to be expensive, and I'm worried with the amount of the money that's available to do all things that need to be done, that they'll lose sight of what the real key is. And you know, we're spending a fortune on airport security and we should be spending that money, a lot more of that money on . . . I mean you've got to have a security baseline, not just for airports; a baseline all around. It's true for the ports. It's true for every place you go. You have to have some sort of a baseline security so that some dufus can't just walk in and blow something up on a whim.

Q: Sure.

VADM Riutta: But against a dedicated terrorist you need good intelligence.

Q: Yes.

VADM Riutta: And those are the ones that are going to come in with your weapons of mass destruction. That's the thing that you need to. You know, you've got to invest your money where the biggest pay off is going to be or the biggest prevention is going to be, and that's going to be tough because we won't have enough money to do everything we want to do.

Q: Where do you see the Coast Guard in say five years, ten years, in terms of numbers? Do you see it bigger or smaller than it is now?

VADM Riutta: I would say bigger but not significantly so. I think we will probably grow maybe 10 to 15 percent. You can already see the balking in Congress over growing TSA [Transportation Security Administration] and where the money is being spent. TSA has a heavy lift ahead of it as it moves into Homeland Security. There's going to be a lot of other people competing for money. I would suggest that when the Homeland Security office agency stands up, or whatever they get as their final name, and we, Customs, and a whole bunch of other people go together, some of the duplicate of effort that's going on among the different forces will be eventually be eliminated. For a while it won't. I mean there's just going to be a lot of cat fighting as this thing stands up.

Q: Sure.

VADM Riutta: But, you know, Customs - and I shouldn't pick on Customs but I will - Customs has an air arm and a surface arm that they have absolutely no need for. They built that during the marijuana wars because we and Customs were in two different departments.

Q: It was a departmental fight.

VADM Riutta: It was [then-Commissioner of the Customs] Willie Von Raab who built it and good for Willie. I mean he went to his committees and he got the funding and he built an air arm and he built a navy and an air force arm for the Customs Service. The Coast Guard at the time had the Customs navy and air force. That's our job. We're still officers of the Customs. That's a duplicate service that does not need to be done and you've seen what it's evolved into. Over time there will be, of necessity, efficiencies reamed out of that department. So from a taxpayer's standpoint I'm delighted to see the Coast Guard and the Customs Service in the same department. It's not going to be pretty for awhile until that gets wrung out, but eventually it will. So I guess my point is that we may grow bigger as a result of that, assuming that the Navy and the Air Force for the Homeland Security Agency comes to the Coast Guard and not to the Customs Service, which logic would dictate that it will, but in politics logic doesn't always rule.

Q: Well I don't know the first day or year that you stepped foot on the [Coast Guard] Academy grounds.

VADM Riutta: 1964.

Q: So you started your career . . .

VADM Riutta: In the Treasury Department.

Q: In the Treasury Department. Does the Coast Guard have an identity problem? You mentioned this dichotomy over the last ten years or so. One of the questions I try to ask all the flags at some point in these interviews is, if every Marine's a rifleman, what's every Coast Guardsman.?

VADM Riutta: A jack of all trades and a master of none. Well that's not true. We're masters at many things, but I think we do have an identity crisis in that regard. I think it's focusing a little bit at post-9/11, but prior to that time we didn't know what we wanted to be. We didn't know if we wanted to be lifesavers, guardians of the marine environment, warfighters, which was a dying breed here for awhile, search and rescue people, regulators. We're still all those things, and there's nothing wrong with that. It's at some point you have to go back to your basic thing. We're an organization grounded in the sea, serving people that work on and around the sea, but most of our people don't go to sea, and that's a tough one to come to grips with.

Q: In other words it's hard to have a unifying principle as say an organization of sailors when a lot of the organization is not sailors.

VADM Riutta: Running out of sailors.

Q: Right, exactly. Does the service need to have, say mandatory sea tours, or small boat tours, or something like that for its young officers so that it has those unified principles?

VADM Riutta: For your young officers, it probably is, yes. I would say it does if you're going to call it a seagoing service. Does everybody have to go to sea all the time or over and over again? No, not really, because there isn't enough room for everybody at sea anyway.

Q: Sure.

VADM Riutta: And what that will evolve into as we get minimally crewed ships; with highly technical ships, we're going to have smaller crews. So there's going to be fewer bunks afloat and they're going to require that people in those bunks go back more and more and more. So that cadre is going to shrink even further unless we go to multiple crewing where we keep the ships out more and that way we have more sailors and less ships. I'm not worried about . . .

(INTERVIEWED INTERRUPTED)

Q: I just want to go over any final thoughts you might have where you started on this in one bureaucracy and ended up half way into another. Those arguments went on forever since I've been in the Coast Guard, and presumably for decades before then, whether this DOT [Department of Transportation] fit was the right one for the Coast Guard, and then overnight the whole issue was resolved for us by five guys in the basement of the White House. Is this, do you think, where the Coast Guard should be and was this inevitable, or did it take something like 9/11 to do this, and are we just multiplying the schizophrenia in terms of lifesaving and marine environmental protection by going into, lock stock and barrel, into Maritime Homeland Security?

VADM Riutta: I think that's where we belong because just about everything we do in one shape or form is for the security of the Nation; security of the homeland. Now if this department loses its way and focuses solely on security at the expense of fisheries and law enforcement, and it doesn't realize that those things are all part of the economic security of our country, then we will be no better off than we were in DOT. We'll just get another different portion of our budget emphasized. I think it was inevitable because this is what came out of a very, very well thought out study, which the name slips my mind right now, but it's the one that reported out a year before 9/11 or so.

Q: Hart-Rudman [United States Commission on National Security/21st Century].

VADM Riutta: Hart-Rudman, yeah. I mean I've been doing fish stuff too long. I forget. (Laughter)

Q: Well it's only because I've been doing Maritime Homeland Security for nine months now that I know about it.

VADM Riutta: But they did a lot of good thought. They predicted what was going to happen and they predicated what they needed to do and they made a good case for putting the organizations together. Without 9/11 that would have never happened.

Q: That's right.

VADM Riutta: It had to be a cataclysmic event on that scale in order to force the political process to get people to begin to give up some of their sovereignty. I mean you've seen that infamous Homeland Security chart that has thousands of boxes and wiring diagrams. Well behind all those boxes are committees on the Hill too. So the bureaucratic inertia on both the Administration-side and on the Congressional-side to perpetuate the status quo and not give up any of your nodes of power was overwhelming until this type of event occurred. And the only way it was ever going to happen was five people in the basement and the President saying, by God, it's going to be that way, because we would have studied this to death. No one could ever had come to a conclusion among the departments because nobody wanted to be the donor.

Q: Clearly the Coast Guard can't be an anonymous agency anymore. It's right on the front pages every day. Does the officer corps, or the service wide, have to get used to this, or once we get to the new agency do we shrink back, become obscure again?

VADM Riutta: No, I think that would be the worst thing we could do. When Jim Loy came on as Commandant, one of his goals was to raise the visibility of the Coast Guard. I know it was a smart and very bright goal. The results, I think, have put us in a position that we were quickly looked on after 9/11 as the go-to guys in the United States. There was no question. All the arguments that went on about who takes care of the border, who takes care of the air and who takes care of the airports, never happened on the waterfront. There was no question in anybody's mind, at least anybody that counted, and definitely not in the American public's mind, who is responsible for security in the ports and waterways of the United States. It's the United States Coast Guard. That is a direct function of the visibility of our organization, and I don't think we would ever want to go back to obscurity. That's how you can go through death by a thousand cuts. You can't make your case from an obscured position. You take the crumbs off the table. That's why we were not ever able to come out of the shadow of the Navy in the intelligence community, because we were some obscure little organization that nobody really knew or cared what we did within the intelligence committees. Now it's the committees that put us as a member of the Intel community and that took a lot of work to get that recognition brought up. But that's getting out from under the bushel basket, if you will. You know, if you've got a great light don't stick it under a bushel basket and hide it.

Q: I think that goes back to what you were talking about, about a kind of a warfighting college. The Service doesn't seem to want to generate the kind of forceful spokespeople. By saying everybody's a spokesman, it's another way of saying that nobody is, or that if somebody becomes too much of a spokesman then they get their limbs sawed off behind them.

VADM Riutta: Well one of the problems we have as an organization, because we're organized along these programmatic functions, is that every time we have to do something we have to form up some God awful matrix team to come to a conclusion, and of course rule by committee is just crazy. So I am a big proponent of an N-Staff, or a J-Staff if you want to do the joint thing. Those are proven very effective. We've fallen into the programmatic trap over the years of, you know, "my program overall" type of thing, and that has really undercut our organizational message. Now we've brought some of that back over the last four years during Jim Loy's tenure, but it was really the crux of some of our problems in 9/11. The fact that we didn't have the ability to respond to a lot of things or didn't see the oncoming train even though there was a very clear headlight at the end of the tunnel. That we were so burrowed in our program that we failed to see the threats that were out there from a security standpoint. We weren't looking at security except for a very small group of folks in OPD [Office of Defense Operations] - as I used to call them - the "keepers of the flame." You know, don't forget, you guys are the keepers of the warfighting flame, and they saw this coming. Maybe not in the same way it materialized, but they saw it coming. But you couldn't really make a lot of headway with it until the *Cole* showed up. And even after the *Cole* it was, ah, it's over there. That's the Navy. Nobody's really coming here. And nobody wanted to come up from their program and look out. And that's not because they are bad people. It's because we're organized and reward programmatic performance as opposed to the more global service performance. That's the job of the Board of Directors; the Flag Corps, to try to rise above that, and I think Jim Loy did a great job of moving us up that spectrum and I'm hoping that [Admiral/Commandant] Tom Collins will continue to move the flag corps in that direction, to think as an organization and impart that to all of our people that you may have a piece of the organization but you've got to think about the bigger Coast Guard first before you start worrying about your program. Otherwise you don't know how it fits in. I think that's the value of Coast Guard Pub[lication] One that we took so long to get out. It brings everybody back to our roots, if you will. What is this organization about? Is it the best document in the world? Probably not, but it's a good start.

Q: Are there any final thoughts you wanted to add Admiral that we haven't covered?

VADM Riutta: Yeah, yeah I would.

Without the Reserve and without the Auxiliary we would have been dead in the water on the 12th of September. We would have probably been able to muddle along for a little while because our people are good and we work them to death. But much of the expertise we needed resided within the Reserve Force

that we brought onboard and much of the relief we needed in terms of sheer numbers and willingness to take on the jobs came from the Auxiliary; everything from driving people to their stations and manning the radios, to coming in and working wherever they were needed, or getting out and actually doing patrols on the water; delivering Sea Marshals. The Auxiliary stepped up to the plate huge, and nobody should ever forget what a tremendous contribution that they made. Had we lost the Coast Guard Reserve as it was threatened to do not that many years ago, or had we not had a tremendous Auxiliary like we have, we would have broken our force within a matter of months. As it was, we stretched it to the absolute limit and I don't think we could have stretched it much more. But I think we would have broken our force in a matter of four or five months had we not had those two other forces to depend on. And I'm not sure that I could have even remotely, without DoD [Department of Defense] help, secured the port of LA without PSU 311. And I know that [Rear] Admiral [Erroll M.] Brown could not have secured Puget Sound without PSU 313. No doubt in my mind. Now the Navy eventually showed up with Harbor Defense Forces but they weren't ready to go on Day One. It took a long time for them to figure out how to get there and mobilize and get reorganize and show up. The Navy active duty forces are not the right forces to bring into a harbor for this type of situation. So even though the Navy stood up very quickly and offered me . . . I had a phone call from [Admiral] Tom Fargo who was the Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet, and from [Vice Admiral] Mike Bucchi who is Commander, Third Fleet, asking what do you need? Tell me and we'll get it if we've got it. Tremendous cooperation there, but without our Reserve and our Auxiliary standing up the way they did, and without our people working so hard, you know, we used to complain about the 80-hour work week. Post 9/11; for about six months, people would have been thankful for an 80-hour workweek. We ground our people right into the ground. But they did it with a spirit that is absolutely inspiring to me as a leader. I would get my batteries charged just riding around on one of our small boats that have been working their butts off, because these young kids knew they were doing something important. They understood we were in a war. They understood we had a lot to lose if we didn't do it right. And they got the thanks from the public that they hadn't seen in a long time at a level far beyond what they had ever seen before, and they got some recognition for it, for doing a good job. So that's it.

I also need to tell you that together on the West Coast at least we had absolutely outstanding cooperation from both Admiral Fargo and Admiral Bucchi, PACFLT and in Third Fleet. They were there for us. They provided anything they could and they understood and said right up front, you do this. You're in charge of the ports and waterways. We understand that. We are here to provide whatever support you need. There was no, we're in charge, you know, I'm the Navy. I'm in charge. I'm the big guy here, which was a big concern by the way of a lot of people in our organization, who said, oh my God, if we stand up a Maritime Defense Zone, if we do this, is the Navy going to take over? There was never any doubt in my mind out here on the West Coast that that was ever going to happen. There was no interest whatsoever in taking on this mission. They have plenty to do. They know and understand clearly that they're in support of the Coast Guard here and that never became an issue. And whenever they could provide support, in whatever form they could provide, they did.

Q: It's one of those things that are on the books and still sort of like a vestigial organ that hasn't been used in 50 years, or 60 years now. But it seems almost to me after nine months, inconceivable, that in a lot of ways, that if the order was given for us to become part of the Navy that it would happen in any kind of seamless way. Is that something that you see as well in terms of how that would proceed if the order was given, that if we're at full scale war we operate as part of the Navy? Is that something that the Coast Guard can do easily or is that something that would happen with just a great anguish?

VADM Riutta: It depends on where you do it and what you say. I cannot conceive with anything short of global warfare, and I'm talking about . . .

Q: Island hopping in the Pacific.

VADM Riutta: Yeah, even that, yeah.

Q: That's right.

VADM Riutta: Only in World War II type global warfare would we ever come under the Navy as a Service. What we have established over the last couple of decades, which works very well, is the ability to chop forces back and forth. What has happened since 9/11 is a growing understanding and appreciation of the Navy of our ability to control those forces. And while there were pockets around the Navy that have worked with us before and understood it; Tom Fargo being one who was more than willing to chop forces to us. I think there are far more willing hands within the Navy to do that now than ever before, that understand that we do know what we're doing. That we can run a good command and control operation in and around ports and harbor ways and the approaches to the United States, and that we can fold Navy forces with our units. We've got the PC-170s. We brought the Harbor Defense Commands in. All those things came in and everybody said, oh, it's going to be a problem. Hey, those guys love working for us. They love it.

Q: Of course one of our best friends is a HDC-201 [Harbor Defense Command 201, a joint USN-USCG coastal defense unit] in Newport, Rhode Island. Twenty to 30 percent of those guys are Coasties.

VADM Riutta: Uh-huh.

Q: And then one thing I didn't know, but one of the best interviews I've done in this whole project was with [Rear] Admiral [Jeffrey J.] Hathaway who lost . . . came over from the Pentagon to Headquarters that morning and two hours later 42 of the 50 people in his office were dead.

VADM Riutta: Yeah.

Q: And almost certainly is the only Coast Guard flag officer who has had people killed under his direct command. And what that guy's gone through for the last nine months, I wouldn't wish that on anybody.

VADM Riutta: No, it's been tough.

Q: But on top of all the things he had to deal with, he's also in charge of Force Protection for the Navy, which I don't think anybody outside, even in the Service, most people don't know that.

VADM Riutta: No, very few people know that. As a matter of fact very few people in the Navy know that. Those relationships that we have built by having . . . and it goes back decades. It goes back to the Junior Officer Exchange Program when we had . . . it goes back to Vietnam. But it goes back to the Junior Officer Exchange Program most recently where we send Coast Guard officers to ride Navy ships who immediately flush up to key jobs because they're high caliber people. It goes back to deployments to the Persian Gulf where our ships go over and just do tremendous jobs. It goes back to TACLETs deploying to Bahrain and showing people how the Coast Guard knows how to do port security; all those things that we've done over the years. It goes back to Haiti-Cuba-Haiti when the Coast Guard ran the operation and the Navy worked for us. It goes back to all those interactions. It goes back to the drug war where the Navy ships come in and they work for a Coast Guard flag in charge of JIATF [Joint Agency Task Force]. All those things create a list of bonafides, if you will, with the warfighters in the Pentagon. It's very important to us as an organization to maintain our military nature, which is only one portion of the things that we do. But I think our credibility is much higher, because at 9/11 we had already built that baseline of knowledge over time. Now there are people that still think we're just a Hooligan's navy; people that think that we're trying to be like the Navy. We're not. There are people that don't understand who we are and what we do, both in the Navy side and within our own Service, who don't appreciate that relationship. But that big brother/little brother relationship we have with the Navy is growing in respect and understanding. The NAVGARD [Navy-Coast Guard] Board that's been going on for years is another avenue where people start to begin to work together. The National Fleet Concept that we developed when Jim Loy was Commandant and worked through so meticulously with the CNO [Chief of Naval Operations]. All those things and a whole lot more have established us within the Navy and with the DoD hierarchy as players in our part of the world. We're not battleground players. We don't have the tools to play in that and we don't need to play in that. We're not trying to be another Navy. But they understand that there is a certain

spectrum in warfighting in which we're about as good as it gets, if not the best in the world at it. And there's a growing respect for us as an organization, I believe, within DoD, for the niche that we play and that's a niche that we will be able to play for some time. And there's an interface there where it's very easy to flow forces back and forth. At some point it becomes all our game. At some point it's all their game. But there is an interface, depending on the circumstance; it kind of grows and shrinks depending on who has what capability. And that's what the National Fleet thing is all about. And I think our working relationship with the Navy has never been stronger, and probably with the Department of Defense has never been stronger. And I think . . . I don't think, I'm sure that will continue when we move to a new department. How we continue to interact with DOT is going to be the interesting question.

Q: Yes it is.

VADM Riutta: Because it's never been a good fit for us. Even though you can make all the logical arguments in the world of why we should be there, you can also probably make those for three or four other agencies. And until this current Secretary came along we weren't treated all that well. Even Secretaries that liked us didn't have time for us. Secretary [of Transportation Norman] Mineta took the time to be our Service Secretary and I think we owe him a great debt for that. And because of that we were able to raise our visibility during Admiral Loy's and Secretary Mineta's tenure because we had a Secretary that supported us. We were far more effective on 9/11 because we had a Commandant who understood warfighting, understood his Secretary, and we had a Secretary who was on our side as a force and knew and appreciated this Service, and stood up for us and with us. And I think those are a couple of keys to our effectiveness that perhaps gets overlooked from time to time as everybody goes, oh boy, we're out of DOT.

Q: Sure.

VADM Riutta: Don't forget the fact that we had a Secretary who was a former Army intelligence officer, who was interned in the Second World War, who's very savvy after many years as a Congressman, who understood the value of our organization to the National Transportation System and to the national economy, and so appreciated the difficult task we had before us to secure the ports and keep commerce moving. He appreciated that probably more than any Secretary that we've ever had and probably more than just about any other Cabinet official. And so I guess you can tell I'm a Norman Mineta fan, but I am and rightfully so. Having that strong Service Secretary, which we never had before, having a warfighting-Commandant and two Area Commanders who had worked directly with him made us very effective, I think, as an organizational team in the early days of the crisis.

Q: That's clear. And everything that I've learned from the District Commanders supports that. As I say, it was sort of adult leadership time and they had it. If they needed something they knew they could come to you or Admiral Allen, and if he could get it he was going to get it. And you two certainly aren't able to be rolled over lightly, or if at all, and so at the top you had this guy. In fact one of the most interesting stories I heard at Headquarters was . . . I think he was a PA [Public Affairs] guy; a Captain, and he said it must have been about 10:30 when that big whump went through the building, and of course what it was was the shock wave from the explosion at the Pentagon. And all these captains and commanders said, what the hell was that? And the only person in the office who knew what it was, was Admiral Loy, because he had felt shock waves from explosions before. And he said, that was not a sound wave. That was too big. And he said, that was an explosion. And you could tell - I was talking to two captains at the time - you could tell as the one was telling the story, that they realized that they had people above them that had experience that they didn't have and would never have because they hadn't served in a combat situation as a young officer. And that means a lot when the "old man", you know, it's nice to know the "old man" knows what the hell he's talking about. I mean they know that, but to see it so graphically demonstrated .

. .

VADM Riutta: That's a great story.

Q: . . . that he would instantly say that.

VADM Riutta: A shock wave, yeah.

Q: Its little things like that that are going to go into this history. I've tried to stay away from, well you know, Cutter "X" went here and Cutter "Y" went here, and those sorts of things, because I'm just one person trying to cover the whole Service, and initially it was supposed to be 9/11, and now it's 9/11 and all the policy decisions after 9/11, so it's turned into a . . .

VADM Riutta: Well I think you found a key to the strength of our organization, because there are a lot of senior leaders that have grown up together, that have been through crisis together. I mean that's true of other Services, but we're so small.

Q: Yes, the size difference.

VADM Riutta: I mentioned the Haiti-Cuba-Haiti crisis with Jim Loy. Well roll back a few years when Jim Loy was the Executive Assistant for [Admiral / Commandant] Paul Yost; another Vietnam veteran during the height of the marijuana wars when we were doing lots of battles. It was Jim Loy, [Robert] Bob Kramek, Kent Williams, those were the captains on the second deck that I worked for, because I was Deputy in the CPA [Office of Programs] at the time. Then we rolled up to another level and Thad Allen was in that group. You just kind of perpetuate trust among yourselves and as you roll up the ladder together you have an understanding with people that you pick up the phone and you don't spend two weeks writing messages to try to get it in the JOPES [Joint Operation Planning and Execution System] format, which is important for planning purposes, but when you've got a crisis you pick up the phone and you say, I need this. Send it. And you get it.

I'll go back to the Haiti-Cuba-Haiti thing just for a minute, although it's not germane to this history, maybe it will help you understand the organizational trust in there. When the Cubans were coming out in force and they were just burying us in Windward Pass, I was the Deputy of Operations and my boss was gone for some reason, so I was acting "O". Jim Loy was the Area Commander. Bill Leahy was the District Commander in the 7th District. Bob Kramek was the Commandant who had been the 7th District Commander during the previous mass exodus. I got a call from Kramek in the car - and I was out to dinner with my wife - and he says, I just got a call from - I want to say [National Security Advisor] Sandy Berger. Yeah, I believe it was Sandy Berger - I just got a call from the National Security Council Chief and they're about to change the policy on Cuba. Starting tomorrow all Cubans will go to Guantanamo Bay as opposed to Key West. Call the Area Commander and District Commander and tell them that that's going to happen and make plans accordingly. So I called and got the two of them on the line and I said, here's the story. I laid it out for them. I said, what do you need from me? And they said, we'll need something; some follow up in the morning. We just need some tasking orders. So I went and I wrote up a one paragraph tasking message from Headquarters, not a 20 page JOPES message. It said, boom, take for action. By the next morning when I went over to the National Security Council to brief, I walked in and everybody was running around and they made this announcement, and people are wringing their hands, oh my God, what will we do? What will we do? How are we going to handle this? How are we going to handle that? And they got to me and they said, well what's the Coast Guard got in there? I said, well we have three ships steaming down the Old Bahama Channel with close to 2,000 refugees onboard and they will be at Gitmo in 18 hours. I hope you're ready to receive them. And you could have heard a pin drop in the room. They said, how - and I had a Navy two-star sitting next to me and he says, how in the world can you guys change gears that fast? He said, we're still writing the message. I said, well we made one phone call, and that is exactly the repeat of what we did on 9/11. It was a couple of phone calls. I mean I got a call from the Commandant and almost instantaneously, boom, here's the situation as we know it. Are you guys taking action? "Yes Sir we are." "We're doing this, this and this." He said, got it. Keep me briefed. I'll take care of things here.

Q: It's a fascinating story, and with your permission I'll include it, for this reason. The very first day I was on active duty I talked to a lieutenant commander who had helped stand up the IMT [Incident Management Team] at Headquarters and in those first few weeks was responsible at one point for, I think, taking the minutes of one of the flag calls. It was a big round table thing where they go around the whole Service, and she said that the trouble with these guys is that you don't know who they are because they all use each other's first names. And so the Commandant would be saying, oh Ray, I need you to do this, or Thad, what do you about this, or Roy, George, or by the way Dick. So unless you know who all these guys are . . .

VADM Riutta: You don't know who said what.

Q: Exactly. And because it's such a small Service, you're right, chances are you've known these guys for 30 years and you have a sense then of who they are and what their character is and how they're going to react in a certain situation.

VADM Riutta: And there's a lot of trust. There's a lot of trust. And that is so critical in a crisis, to trust the people you work with. Don't worry about sending them paper or what the auditors are going to say when they show up and find out what you did. You know we stood up the Reserves on a phone call. Boss, I'm standing up the Reserves. Do it. I'll get permission from the Secretary. Not wait until I go to the Secretary, wait until he talks to the President. It was absolutely, we know you need them, you got them. We had them onboard, and of course, they were showing up without being stood up.

Q: Right.

VADM Riutta: They were standing at the door, what do you need? And the same is true of the Auxiliary. One anecdote from the Auxiliary for you. Our Commodore for the 11th District South lives in Arizona. On 9/11 he got in his car and drove to San Pedro to the base in San Pedro and reported for duty. He got in his car that night and he drove and he arrived the next morning, and I don't think he went home for three months. This is an unpaid volunteer, okay.

Mary O'Donnell; my Reserve flag, with no prompting, was in Las Vegas working for Bectel [Corporation]. She showed up for work the next morning ready to do whatever needed to be done. And I can cite thousands of stories like that and I'm sure everybody could across the entire Coast Guard.

Q: Sure.

VADM Riutta: That's the kind of folks we have working for us, which is why we did so well, and I think we did extremely well with what we had to work with.

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

VADM Riutta: It's my pleasure Chief.

Q: Everyone told me it would be a wonderful experience and it was. You never know what you're going to expect when you walk into an Admiral's office.

VADM Riutta: Well, I'm just a fish guy now.

END OF INTERVIEW

