

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 Thomas J. Barrett, USCG
Vice Commandant****



**** (Then-RADM Barrett was the Commander of Coast Guard District 17 on 11
September 2001.)**

Interviewer: PAC Peter Capelotti, USCGR
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U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters
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Q: I'd like to start out by just asking you Sir, if you could, sort of encapsulate your career and what led you along your career path to being a District Commander on 9/11.

VADM Barrett: Sure. I enlisted in the Coast Guard right out of college. At the time it was 1968. My draft category was very high. I might have been number three on the draft of that year so I expected to see service of some type. I actually was talking to Navy recruiters about Navy flight schools. A Coast Guard Chief who had a recruiting office next door said, what are you doing here anyway? He said, did you ever think about the Coast Guard? I said, no, I really hadn't, but I grew up on an island. So we talked some more and eventually I ended up coming into OCS. I went afloat. I did a year in Vietnam on [USCGC] *Chase* [WHEC-718] early on.

My goal had been to go to law school, so I actually had applied to law school. I was getting out of the service at the end of my obligation to do that. The Coast Guard offered me the opportunity to go to school and stay in, so I did. They put me through George Washington. I came out, did a couple of tours in legal; in Claims and Litigation, and I liked that. I like the Coast Guard immensely, always have. And again, at a turning point, had the opportunity to go up to Alaska as the District Legal Officer as opposed to going out and doing something else.

Q: Yes.

VADM Barrett: And then subsequent to that I was in the Marine Safety Program here at Headquarters. A variety of tours in and out of legal programs basically; a lot on the support side, a lot on personnel and a lot on legal. Then I had the opportunity to do the Training and Reserve Program here and then, ultimately, District command. What I had going up to Juneau . . . probably the reason I was there is I probably had as much, or more, Alaska experience than anybody; any of the other flags looking to go there. I had spent oh, at that point, maybe ten years in Alaska.

Q: Yes.

VADM Barrett: I had Kodiak twice, had Juneau once before. I knew the state. I knew the operation up there. So I think that played a role in the decision to put me up there.

Q: So faced with a logical alternative they actually made that choice.

VADM Barrett: They made it and I wanted to go.

Q: Yes.

VADM Barrett: Yeah, I wanted to go. So I was delighted to have the assignment and to focus on the tour, and it's a tough environment. It was a tough environment for our people. I was very sensitive to that. I've been through times up there where things were bad. We lost helicopter crews. They weren't attached to me, but the operating environment is very intense and a very high degree of difficulty.

Q: Yes.

VADM Barrett: Routine cases up there can be very treacherous. I can tell you lots of stories, but there are lots of stories that our people are always on the edge. You're always a bit more at risk up there and it's the routine stuff that's tough; like the diving, I mean you've got a high degree of difficulty.

Q: Yes.

VADM Barrett: So we focused a lot up there on that operational excellence piece in our operations. I thoroughly enjoyed it. We've got about 2,000 Coast Guard people up there. It's an aircraft heavy district. You have huge distances, terrible weather, no infrastructure, and all those things actually compounded, sometimes to our advantage, sometimes to our disadvantage, of how we reacted on September 11th.

Q: What does the District Commander have for transportation up there? Did you have a helicopter at your disposal? I mean how do you get around?

VADM Barrett: No. My headquarters is in Juneau. I would normally fly commercial air if I was going somewhere.

Q: Yes.

VADM Barrett: I would fly Coast Guard helicopters if there was a need.

Q: If there was an emergency or something like that.

VADM Barrett: I flew a lot with our crews; the C-130s, the same way.

Q: Yes.

VADM Barrett: Occasionally I'd get transportation from ALCOM; the C-12. I was also the Navy Component Commander for Alaska; for Alaska Command, which ties into some of the stuff we did. The District Commander there is the District Commander, the Navy Component Commander for ALCOM, and also the MARDEZ Commander. But the Navy component piece is a significant and a substantial one. That's a sub-unified command at Elmendorf.

Q: And you were the OIC, or the commander of that?

VADM Barrett: There's an Air Force three-star who is the commander and then he has an Army two-star as the Navy component, and then has links to the National Guard, so that's the force piece.

Q: It would have had been a quarter of five in the morning. Do you get up that early?

VADM Barrett: I didn't get up early that morning. I was up around, probably something like 5:30. That would be about normal for me.

Q: What was your first indication; first notice, that you got that something was wrong?

VADM Barrett: I had a call from the Ops Center.

Q: You did?

VADM Barrett: I did.

Q: Okay.

VADM Barrett: I was up. You know those kinds of things you remember. I remember the date pretty vividly. I can't give you the exact times but I can remember the sequence.

Q: Sure.

VADM Barrett: I had a call from the Ops Center asking if I had seen the TV or heard the news, and I hadn't. So we flipped on the TV and at that point one aircraft had been into the Tower in New York and there was a pretty good indication it was terrorists; at least speculation. I don't think it was firm at that point.

Q: Yes.

VADM Barrett: Yes. So obviously I got dressed, and my office is only ten minutes from the house, less than that. So I got dressed and headed in. I'm trying to remember. It was before I left the house or right around that time when the second aircraft went in. I'm trying to think, is that when I was watching that at work? I can't recall whether I was watching that at work. But at that point things were already spooling up.

Q: Yes

VADM Barrett: I went into the office. We got our commands going. We started recalling people and spooling up an Incident Command scenario set up. Not too long into the morning; maybe 7:00/7:15, I spoke with VADM [Ernest] Riutta [CG Pacific Area Commander], who you mentioned. He had been on a phone link with the Commandant asking us to look at, you know, standing up the ICS. We already were doing that. So that was in play. We were looking at potential targets in our AOR. Alaska's a long way from the World Trade Center but you have the Trans-Alaskan Pipeline up there in Valdez, which we identified as a potential target. You have a fair amount of international traffic coming in and it was very unclear what the targets and range of activities were.

Q: Yes

VADM Barrett: They were shutting down the air traffic system. I spoke with [Lieutenant] General [Norton] Schwartz [USAF] very briefly early on just to touch base, and again, they had the CAP mission and were setting that up. That became significant later.

Q: And he was the Air Force three-star?

VADM Barrett: He's the Air Force three-star. He's also the NORAD Commander; the Air Defense Command Commander, and so he wears a couple of hats also. We were, again, getting most of our news off the TV and some phone links with PAC Area Command Center Headquarters. We were starting to get feeds on information.

Q: Yes

VADM Barrett: We had talked to the MSOs; talked to Valdez in particular. We talked about Valdez as a potential target. A little later on in the morning - I'm guessing around ten o'clock my time, and these things are happening simultaneously - we had a call. It actually came in through two different sources about the same time. Had it from the Air Ops Center at Elmendorf indicating a potential hijacked airliner in our AOR. It was a KAL airliner and the initial report was that maybe it had been hijacked, maybe it hadn't, and they were talking of diverting it toward Cold Bay. There's a large airstrip out at Cold Bay. Our initial response and the reason for the call was SAR. If they're putting a large aircraft down with a couple hundred passengers in a remote location like that . . . and we had been through evolutions like that before, and Cold Bay is actually an alternate site. They had landed a DC-10 up there with some type of

in-flight emergency about a year earlier. So the initial call we got is we might have a hijacked airliner up here. We're thinking of diverting it to Cold Bay. So we started spooling up Kodiak. They started winding up . . .

Q: This was the Air Force saying that they were going to divert it?

VADM Barrett: To say we were going to divert it and they didn't know what the scenario on the aircraft was. It wasn't confirmed as a hijacking. It was a possibility. The FAA Alerting System, also shortly after that, came up with the same type information. We had access to that on the SIPRENET, so we had this report. As that situation evolved the next thing we heard was maybe the aircraft was going to get into the Yakutat, which given the geography again, we started re-directing assets to be able to respond to Yakutat if we had to. That also posed a problem though because the aircraft was not yet under firm control and we had a confirmation of what we believed at the time was a confirmation that the aircraft had been hijacked. The Yakutat geography would push it down towards Anchorage; towards Valdez, and at that point the Captain of the Port of Valdez made a decision to evacuate the port; basically to pull the tankers out of there.

Q: One of the first SITREPs talks about both Valdez and Nikiska being closed.

VADM Barrett: Probably the same time. The Valdez was in response to the aircraft.

Q: It was?

VADM Barrett: It was.

Q: Okay. See, that's not on there, which is why we do these interviews.

VADM Barrett: I know.

Q: So that's why Valdez would have been shut down?

VADM Barrett: Not because of the general risk, but because we had this . . .

Q: Imminent threat.

VADM Barrett: . . . potential sort of threat of an aircraft maybe being hijacked and maybe . . . you know we're trying to speculate what could a target be up here.

Q: Sure.

VADM Barrett: So we're thinking they're going to fly it into the Marine Terminal up there. Nikiska is an LNG terminal. It would have been the same type of thing. But I don't believe we had anybody in Nikiska. That might have been another precaution. Valdez; we had laden tankers in there. There's a constant loading and trans-shipment out of there.

Q: Is there a general level of awareness? This came up when I interviewed RADM [George] Naccara [III; CG First District Commander on 9/11] about LNG tankers. If you're a terrorist or if a terrorist knows what they're doing, an LNG tanker really isn't a great thing to hijack.

VADM Barrett: Right.

Q: It's not going to do that much damage. It would just sort of dribble out and evaporate. Propane's a different story.

VADM Barrett: LPG, right.

Q: But did you sense, as District Commander, that there was an awareness of . . . that there were different levels to these threats before 9/11? That, you know, LNG; a great media weapon but not a great destruction weapon. You blow up the terminal; you disrupt the oil system, so forth and so on.

VADM Barrett: We were much more concerned with Valdez. Now prior to 9/11 I'd say we hadn't focused on it, other than a safety concern.

Q: Yes

VADM Barrett: The issue at Nikiska: there's a refinery there as well as the LNG terminal. In Nikiska they load LNG to take it out to Japan.

Q: Okay.

VADM Barrett: In fact after 9/11 we had trouble getting Headquarters to focus on Nikiska as a potential risk. We were getting directions on LNG, and the scenario up there is so different. It's in a fairly remote area. It's not in a downtown area. They're loading, not off-loading, and they run the same two ships. They've been running them back and forth for 20 years with stable crews and stuff like that. We didn't think we had the same risk profile on LNG. On the other hand, the Marine Terminal at Valdez . . .

Q: And you say that that was not understood here?

VADM Barrett: Well let's just say it took a little while to . . .

Q: Make it understood.

VADM Barrett: . . . make it understood.

Q: Right.

VADM Barrett: And I understand Headquarters. They're issuing blanket stuff and we're just wiggling. We didn't want to spend the resources on that. We didn't have enough assets to do other stuff. Risks up there: the Marine Terminal at Valdez runs 17-percent of the domestic U.S. oil supply and 48-percent of the California crude supply. There's a huge potential economic impact. Plus the pipeline is one of the few things in Alaska that has any type of national visibility, following *Exxon-Valdez*.

Q: Right.

VADM Barrett: But the Marine Terminal at Valdez; if you were to do some substantial damage there it would be very difficult to put that back in service for an extended period.

Q: Yes

VADM Barrett: And plus you have terrorist stuff in the Gulf War. You had an environmental arm.

Q: Sure. The kind of place if you were looking for a strategic hit, that's where you would go.

VADM Barrett: Target. So we had this information, as I said, on the aircraft, and we spooled up on that, evacuated the port of tankers and basically shut down that operation and started moving assets to be able to respond to Yakutat. Over the next hour and a half that situation got clarified. The aircraft was diverted into Canada.

Q: Yes

VADM Barrett: It did land successfully and safely. Passengers were offloaded. It turned out that as part of the discussion and queries, the co-pilot had accidentally activated a hijack alert on the aircraft. So the fact that they had the alert was accurate. The fact that there was no hijacking wasn't known.

Q: Right.

VADM Barrett: And they had some language difficulty and communication difficulty. But the plane was successfully diverted by the Air Force into Canada, landed safely, and that took us off. So that was, oh, I would say between 10:00 and 1:00 our time; that two to three hour span in there.

Q: Was there a sense that once it became clear that this wasn't a threat, that you needed to get Valdez up and running ASAP?

VADM Barrett: Valdez was our number one. The other thing we still had up there at that time of year were a few cruise ships. Again, when you look around up there, there are only a few potential targets. The cruise ships - and we were thinking obviously *Achille Lauro* - not knowing the scenario. But the cruise ship season in Alaska ends the end of September. But we probably had, at that point, four or five ships, maybe six, in Alaskan waters; in various ports or underway. So we were tracking them to find out where they were and trying to increase the security there. So those were the immediate actions we took, was standing up our own units, being prepared to respond and to react, either from a Search and Rescue point of view or a deterrence point of view. Cruise ships and Valdez were the things high on the list. There are some other targets up there we pay attention to but they're not as urgent.

Q: Yes

VADM Barrett: Well the Port of Anchorage International is on our scope. Anchorage International Airport has runway approaches out over the water. Again, if you consider the threat of someone trying to shoot down an airliner - although given the New York scenarios - we were thinking of weapons more than we were the risk to the airliner itself.

Q: Are you located in Alaska in a Federal building? Is that where your Command Center is?

VADM Barrett: We are.

Q: Did that cause any concerns? I know that, for example, RADM [James D.] Hull [9th CG District Commander] had to get out of his because the plane was coming right . . . the fourth plane turned around and came right toward Cleveland and they evacuated. Was that ever considered in Alaska?

VADM Barrett: We had a discussion early on in the morning with the GSA folks, and the two biggest tenants in the Juneau Federal Building are the Coast Guard and the Forest Service. The Forest Service Administrator said, gee, you know, this is a tragedy and people are upset. We're going to tell people they don't really have to come in today, and we said, well we're going the opposite direction here. We're pulling people in. So you can tell your people whatever you want to do but our people are coming in. It wasn't an issue.

Q: Right.

VADM Barrett: We were looking at where our surface assets were; whether we were going to pull a 378 and head them toward Valdez to get a Command and Control platform up there.

Q: Would that have been your secondary or your tertiary Command Center? Did you have a secondary one right in the area?

VADM Barrett: Not right in the area. We would have had to bring a ship in if we wanted it in the area. But we also have access to the Air Force Command Center and State Emergency Command Center in Anchorage, which are out at Elmendorf and Fort Richardson.

Well we did a number of things. We sent someone from MSO Anchorage right out there. That's part of our normal contingency planning is to establish connectivity out there. But we also have . . . Kodiak is fairly robust. They've got a Command Station out there and they've got the Air Station. We're okay with transitioning if we had to, but because of the connectivity, and particularly secure connectivity that we would have lost, it would have been very resistant to that. But it wasn't a problem.

Q: Could you speak a little bit to the - especially given your experience on some of these "M" side of the house and regulatory issues and so forth - it seems from my outside point of view that this brought to the floor this long-standing "M" versus "O" dichotomy in the Coast Guard and the need, in many places, to bring these together.

VADM Barrett: True.

Q: A lot of people I've talked to said if 9/11 was going to happen it was probably good that it happened in New York where you had an Activities.

VADM Barrett: Yeah.

Q: You had one person in command and that person just happened, at that point, to be an Admiral, so they could pull operational assets and so forth.

VADM Barrett: We're small. We don't have Groups, so the District Command Center tends to be your Tactical Operations Center.

Q: For the whole District?

VADM Barrett: For the whole District. But what we actually did very quickly is we assigned our operational units to the MSOs.

Q: You did?

VADM Barrett: I mean it was an easy decision, yeah. We told them for escorts and port patrols, it seemed to me the logic of it was up there, that most of our activities are port-centric or large boat-centric. So we attached assets to the MSOs for them to run the patrols or the escorts, or the inspections or the boardings, and that seemed to work out pretty well. And all the MSOs up there have a fairly robust Command and Control capability too. So they were in a far better position to run that than, say, a station, which we would have had. Air assets were probably the toughest thing here after and we would attach them on a mission basis.

Q: How long did that go on for where you had operational assets working directly for the MSO?

VADM Barrett: It's probably still going on as far as I know.

Q: Okay. Is that something that you see as the norm, or part of the new normalcy in the Coast Guard; this increasing coordination between the MSOs and the Groups, or let's say in Alaska, between operational units and the MSOs?

VADM Barrett: Yeah, I see it as a kind of a norm. Its all-situational dependent and I wouldn't predict where the Coast Guard would go. I think the coordination issue's obvious. You've got to have a unified command. You can't have different people playing. At the same time you have tremendous experience bases that are very different.

Q: Sure.

VADM Barrett: But given that mission and given the initial focus on harbor and port issues, that made sense to me. At the same time, as we get into more Maritime Domain Awareness issues and you try to push stuff offshore, I'm not sure that the play is the same.

Q: Yes

VADM Barrett: In fact on some of the offshore stuff; some of our boardings up there, we take the exact opposite tact. That is the Operation folks; the cutters basically, are doing the boardings. We would frequently attach someone from the MSO to the cutter for their boardings so that the boarding team would have "M" expertise on the team, but the program was being run by the operational unit; the patrol boat or a larger cutter, doing some the offshore boardings. So we kind of try to tailor it to fit the scenario. Where we had the Operational Command and Control - say with a cutter - we were giving them the "M" asset. Where the Command and Control in the port was with the COTP or the CO of the MSO, we were giving them the platform assets to work.

Q: The biggest port security crisis, or situation, for the senior leadership since the Second World War in your mind.

VADM Barrett: Oh, I think so. You know we never really thought of it as a crisis. We thought of it as a . . . it wasn't a new mission. When I came in the Coast Guard years ago we were doing some of this stuff. It was an issue in Vietnam with transport vessels, explosives vessels, you know, kind of that mission was always there. I think we had a lot of people not used to doing it. Well I'll give you an example. Our people stand up very well. We had kind of unarmed the "M" folks. When I came in, all the MSOs had people who were weapons qualified. They had weapon lockers. That was part of their normal capability, and then we took all that away. Well right after 9/11 we went right back there. These folks have got to be able to put out armed boarding teams. We don't always have operational units with LE teams available, so now we went right back to re-qualifying folks at the MSOs with weapons. I remember one of the early questions I got from Captain [William J.] Hutmacher at MSO Anchorage was like, we're happy to do this. We know we need to do this, but is this going to be a short fused thing? Am I going to invest all this time and energy . . . ?

Q: And take my guns away in six months.

VADM Barrett: And in six months someone's going to say, well that's not the right answer.

Q: Right.

VADM Barrett: I said, well, as long as I'm up we're going to do it because you've got to have the weapons. We had to get back quickly to being a more armed, better armed Coast Guard, and better trained, because really you . . . we'll fast forward a little bit, but we worked out a number of scenarios. We had great support from the Air Force as we stood up stuff in Valdez and elsewhere. The Air Force, and actually the U.S. Attorney; we linked to their Counter Terrorism Task Force; the FBI. We tended to work

together pretty well up there so we had a pretty clear idea of who the players were . We exercised regularly so there wasn't much role confusion. At a practical level you had to work stuff out . But we had . . . Valdez is a good example, of submarine escorts. There's a sound range outside of Ketchikan where Navy subs calibrate their noise levels.

Q: Yes

VADM Barrett: So prior to 9/11 we didn't escort those high value assets, now we do. But our approach there, or up at Valdez, is we take a 110 or a RIB, you know, a boarding team; a LEDET basically, and we put them out there and we told them . . . I remember the discussion with Valdez. We wanted them to have their weapons ready and loaded. You know the point is you're out there. It's an awareness mission. It's a presence mission. It's a deterrence mission. But ultimately it's a stop a mission and we were comfortable doing that with our people as long as they were qualified.

Q: Yes

VADM Barrett: The other Services we were dealing with, I'm talking about the National Guard, stood people up with no bullets in their guns.

Q: Right.

VADM Barrett: The authority to load their weapons probably was at the O-6 level. So we had a lot of dialogue with them about how this was going to work and we were very comfortable, and I was very comfortable, as long as people were properly trained. Because of our LE background the most likely problem set we're going to get is a port security zone in Valdez, and we put security zones in there and around passenger ships, and stuff like that. It was probably a confused, drunk, or disgruntled fisherman; that's the most likely intrusion we were going to have.

Q: Yes

VADM Barrett: The consequences are just unacceptable so you've got to plan that scenario. And so I really wanted people to assess the situation carefully, but you need them to be able to react, and our people are very, very good, and I had very high confidence in them.

Q: You mentioned *Achille Lauro*. Since you get, what, 70-odd cruise ships coming up there every year, is there a plan on the shelf if a cruise ship is taken hostage of how the Coast Guard would handle that?

VADM Barrett: Oh sure. Well I wouldn't call it . . . everything is scenario dependent and it depends, I'd think again where there is not any role confusion. If there's a hostage taking scenario and it's Federal, the FBI is the lead agency.

Q: Okay.

VADM Barrett: So from a Coast Guard perspective it's easy. What are we going to do? We're going to support the FBI. If it involved a state ferry then who's in charge? It's going to be the State Police, and what are we going to do? We're going to support the State Police. If it's a casualty of some kind we would bring our normal resources to bear.

Q: Yes

VADM Barrett: But we do that routinely. We have law enforcement actions all the time. Not just there, anywhere in the country, where we partner with other agencies and we get in and we react. With a

vessel we would do certain things in terms of vessel security, isolation and stuff like that. But really our role swings in terms of who's in charge.

Q: Let me ask you, going back to this whole idea of weapons qualifications. Is that a done deal among the senior leadership that the Coast Guard would be better armed and that you'll see most, if not all, Marine Safety and Security people with side arms from now on?

VADM Barrett: I think the idea that the Marine Safety and Security people have to be able to bring appropriate force to bear is a done deal. That can be non-lethal. It can be lethal. And having enough qualified personnel in boarding teams to be able to execute that, I don't think that's going back the other way. Does that mean everybody needs to be qualified? No, but I think you need to be able to put enough force on . . . we've had that problem in LE situations for a year. But one of the ways you control situations is by having enough force to deal with it. It doesn't mean you use it. But judgmental stuff is getting tough.

Q: Yes.

VADM Barrett: And we worked through a lot of seams. A lot of problems come in the seams. Not too long into the Valdez scenarios we had reports of a helicopter at night. We had a 110 out there patrolling a security zone and they thought they saw flashing lights. So now you have, okay, is the weapon of choice now not an airliner? Is it a small plane? Is it a helicopter? A helicopter, okay. Should they shoot at it? And I had, fortunately again, we had had the discussions with NORAD; with General Schwartz, and our guidance was, no, we're not in the air war stuff. The only time we were going to shoot at an airplane is if it's clear; I mean unequivocally clear, that they're attacking us or someone else. But all those seams had to be worked out. And again, there's high risk to harming innocent people as well as terrorists.

The other thing that's remarkable is the change in our - this may be something I'm curious if the other Districts saw - is the change - and you see it in the country I think - in our attitude or approach to stuff. About a week, maybe ten days - no, it was less than that - maybe a week after September 11th we had started flying patrols around Valdez to see what was out there. We see a boat anchored out off of Hitchenbrook Entrance behind an island. It was a skiff, maybe 22/24-foot skiff, twin outboards, aluminum boat, and it's just anchored there. Well I mean that stuff always goes on up there. We see it. Well now we worry about . . . we've got oil tankers transiting in and out of here. It's inside the entrance. They've got to slow down. So what do you do? Well, we can't locate anybody who owns the skiff. We put a buoy tender in there and took the skiff out. We collected it, okay? We would have never done that a year ago.

Q: Of course now you have to worry about somebody sending a skiff that's got four or five hundred pounds of explosives on it just waiting for you to come pick it up.

VADM Barrett: That's right, just having the skiff there, available.

Q: Sure.

VADM Barrett: As it turned out we had trouble identifying the owner, but we were able to run traces on serial numbers and the guy who owned it was from Fairbanks, Alaska; many, many miles away, and he had a floatplane and used to fly his floatplane out there. That was his fishing skiff. He'd fish out in that area and hop on his plane and go home. He put it in the water in April/May, probably May, up there, late May, and took it out around the end of September.

Q: Yes

VADM Barrett: But he had been doing that for years and he had no problems. We gave him his boat back, but he understood. But the filter through which we looked at stuff became very different.

Q: Yes. Let me ask you - if you could envision this on that morning - when you went to OCS we were . . . you were in OCS in '64?

VADM Barrett: Sixty-nine.

Q: Oh, '69?

VADM Barrett: I graduated in '69, '68/'69.

Q: You were enlisted before that?

VADM Barrett: No, just through OCS.

Q: Okay, so you've been in DOT for your whole career?

VADM Barrett: Yeah, they just moved about that time, yeah, '68 I think.

Q: 1967, yes. Did you think that morning that this would lead to, as it appears now it's going to, the Coast Guard going to a whole new agency?

VADM Barrett: No. What was clear to me is we were going back to a much closer - probably never lost it - but our connections to DoD. We're going to tie up, because it was clear that they had a lot of assets to bring to bear. But you've got *posse comitatus*; a lot of restrictions on what they can do and what they want to do, quite frankly, in the homeland, and what they view their mission set is. So it was clear that we had a set of skills and competencies that we could bring to bear on this problem and we would be the pipeline, in many respects, for the heavier-duty assets.

Q: Yes

VADM Barrett: So when we do the spool-up exercises for Northern Edge - like the Captain of the Port up there. He's the Maritime Component Commander - and he's getting Army and he's getting Air Guard, and he's getting Air Force and he's getting Navy. There are assets streaming in in support of his effort, and linking with the FBI and the State Police and the local police. So that was probably my take away; that we were going back more towards being a linking pin to DoD for this mission. I really didn't have a sense at all of how this would . . .

Q: The closest armed service to the American public.

VADM Barrett: Something like that, yeah, and having that dual law enforcement/military role . People like the Coast Guard. You know they trust us, even in law enforcement. We've always used the example of fisheries up there, but people don't like to have their fishing boats boarded for us to inspect their fish.

Q: Sure.

VADM Barrett: But they know that the same guys that are doing it are going to come out in a helicopter if their boat's going down; a huge credibility issue for us. And so that multi-mission suite brings a lot of credibility and trust to the organization.

Q: Is there a strategy on the part of the senior leadership as this process moves forward? They say, well look, cutters great, helos great. But small boats, ah, we can put them in the Department of Small Boats, Search and Rescue or whatever we're going to call it. Is there a strategy to keep the whole Service cohesive and a rationale for why that's important?

VADM Barrett: Well I think the rationale is pretty direct, at least certainly in my mind, a pretty clear nexus between our missions. In other words, Homeland Security is, say, anti-terrorism. Well, we're doing counter-narcotics. I mean there's links between what we do there and terrorism. There's links . . . SAR; having the ability . . . this is something . . . this is me speaking now. I want you to presume it's me.

Q: Sure.

VADM Barrett: Our ability to put assets on top of a problem anywhere along the U.S. coast, or even in Alaska, within an hour or two for SAR, that's a huge capability. There isn't another organization in this country I believe that has the ability to put people, assets, cutters, aircraft and trained capable resources against a problem as quickly and as well managed as we do on a nationwide basis. Now the U.S. military can do that in a very focused way, but even in this country . . .

Q: Probably not that fast.

VADM Barrett: Not that fast and not that quickly with the level of skill that we bring to bear. So I think that as you put those people out there for SAR, well we can probably load them up with LEDETS. We can put them on boats. We can have cutters intercept people offshore. If we're patrolling - and we would up there - for SAR or for fisheries enforcement, the platforms are there. The people are trained for that. So I think there's a nexus between all these missions and our capabilities, and even on the low end it's the boardings, the SAR, the safety functions. I'll give you a take. This was my own take up in Alaska again. I would tell the Marine Safety people this. Well I thought our safety functions became more important than ever; again, the nexus. We're worried about the *Achille Lauro*, the cruise ships, and these are two and three thousand passenger cruise ships. These are large numbers of people. I saw an analogy the other day, or heard it. This is the World Trade Center laid on its side and put on the water.

Q: Yes.

VADM Barrett: Okay, that's what a cruise ship is in terms of scope.

Q: A terrific analogy.

VADM Barrett: That's how many people are there. Well, we pay a lot of attention to fire protection systems. One of my worst nightmares up in D-17 was a fire on a large passenger ship that we had trouble getting to and maybe is compounded by bad weather and isolation, and the lack of infrastructure. You know the community hospital in Sitka is 28-beds. If you have an incident involving hundreds of people around there you've either got to get help in or you've got to get people out. So there's a huge range of things for us to manage. Well, fire protection systems on these boats are integral to our managing it and the ship's got to be able to deal with it. If there is a fire it's got to be controlled and contained and put out before it involves the whole ship. But after 9/11 that doesn't become less important. It becomes more important. You can't have somebody able to do something that puts the whole ship on fire. Or if an accident occurs or an incident occurs, you've got to be able to contain it and put it out or respond to it. So I think that connection between our missions, and sometimes in not so obvious ways, is critical to effectiveness in doing the stuff. You know, the Domain Awareness no one wants out there. We have huge great connectivity with our port communities. People talk to us. In Valdez we had the guy in the barbershop calling up saying I have a couple people in the barbershop and they're asking kind of weird questions. And you know, maybe its bad guys. Maybe it's just some guy getting a haircut with weird questions. But people were sensitized to it.

Q: Yes

VADM Barrett: We get that connectivity and we can take advantage of that.

Q: And this nexus is interesting. Is there a point at which, as you seem to suggest, everything the Coast Guard does, whether it's migrant interdiction, drug ops or port security, can all be thought of as border security issues?

VADM Barrett: I think so. They're not all anti-terrorism.

Q: Right.

VADM Barrett: If we have a problem with migrants coming up on the beach, they're anybody. If you can smuggle people in you've got a problem. You can smuggle people in containers. Containers are a big issue these days. I think our ability to secure the maritime borders is crucial to the Nation's security. I think all our mission suite fits together and particularly the capability of our people. Our people are very, very good at what they do.

And the other thing is I don't think anybody can search the way we can. Here's a good example. DoD can for the war. The Coast Guard Reserves; Alaska, our numbers were small, but in a couple of days we had 30 or 40 people on duty up there in the Port of Valdez in the Incident Command Center. I mean that was almost instantaneous, or instantaneous, within a few days. What if you have to spool up Customs or INS. They don't have 8,000 Reserves they can call to spool up.

Q: Right.

VADM Barrett: What are they into? Well they're into a hiring process and maybe it'll take six months. Maybe it'll take a year. They don't have that surge capability that we take such . . . we have Strike Teams. They've got Reserves attached to them. If you need a bigger Strike Team you get the full team up.

Q: I spent a week with the Atlantic Strike Team and spoke to people up and down the unit and they had Reservists there by ten o'clock that morning who were manning the Comm Center so the other guys could load up and get to New York.

VADM Barrett: I had retirees calling up September 11th. Can we come back? We want to help. We're still current; a Coast Guard ethic obviously at play there. But I think that capability that we have; the organic capability, is really unmatched outside of DoD, and DoD is not focused on this particular mission suite.

Q: Let me ask you about a couple of things that came up during my visit to Gitmo [Guantanamo Bay, Cuba] with the Port Security Unit there.

VADM Barrett: PSUs, sure.

Q: Those are Reserve units, at least the 305 that was in Gitmo has been, for all intensive purposes, an active duty unit for the last year.

VADM Barrett: Yeah.

Q: I think they got back from Gitmo about two weeks ago. A couple of things: one is the length of the deployment; not so much that they didn't know that they could be asked to go somewhere for a long time but the fact that most of our Port Security Units, or if not all of them, are Reserve units made up of cops and firemen, and this was a cop and fireman crisis, and still is to a certain extent.

VADM Barrett: Sure.

Q: You've got police departments, fire departments around the country that are being asked to do things now that they never did on 9/10.

VADM Barrett: Sure.

Q: Is that on the radar screen of the senior leadership that these people have sort of dual Homeland Security roles now and a new kind of conception? I know we have MSSTs [Coast Guard Marine Safety and Security Teams] on the horizon, but is there a sense that these units have to be thought of in a new way?

VADM Barrett: I don't think so, other than on an individual basis, and I think we've always tried to work that. In other words, if we need a reservist - and I'm sure we had that scenario come up where the question was raised about pulling that particular individual out of a particular job they were doing at that point in time - I think we tried to be fairly sensitive to that. That's always one of the great strengths of the Reserve is the access to those type of skill sets.

Q: Sure.

VADM Barrett: So I don't think institutionally we've really thought too much about that other than we are doing the MSSTs. You know, again, there's a success story there but it's funny. We went through - it was back in the Reserve in '97 and '99 - we went through a lot of effort in there to get the Reserves up to strength. We were standing up PSUs. We got thirteen million dollars. Congressman [Bill] Young from Florida was instrumental in helping get that. But you know it was a push to get all those things and there was this downsize, you know justify them, too big, prove to me you need all these people. Prove to me you need all this. And what was coming is we kept coming up with the same answers.

Q: Yes

VADM Barrett: Okay. Well we really, under any scenario, it looked like we needed about twelve and a half thousand Reservists if what you told us our contingency planning needs really were, and by the way, we needed to have them with this kind of training and they don't have it. And you kept getting this, well, wrong answer. Well nobody's telling us this is the wrong answer anymore, but it took a kind of crisis. Well it took a terrible tragedy of monumental proportions in this country for people to say, oh yeah . . . I think it's been part of the history of this country by the way. I don't think it's unique to September 11th.

Q: Oh no, I think you're right. We fall asleep about every generation.

VADM Barrett: We fall asleep. It's like we're pushing up answers or risks, or costs, that people don't want to have to face. You know the Coast Guard was going through a big downsizing *per se*. People in the organization were saying, you know - and that was driven by Congress I think - we can't do all these things you're asking us to do with the number of the people you're asking us to do it with and the resources, and then you start to grow the organization. And now people are saying, look at all these things we're asking you to do and you don't have enough resources to do it. The Coast Guard's been saying that for years, and so now it's beginning . . . I think it was 9/11 that caused people to pause and say, is that important to us, and if it is, then we've got to resource it. On the Reserve side we're always going with the story that our willingness to face up to the cost of the world we want and the level of security we want and the type of country we want, I think is much different today than it was prior to 9/11.

Q: True.

VADM Barrett: It's true up in Alaska. I think it's true down here. It's not an easy problem set. You've got these asymmetric, outside our imagination, threats.

Q: And some of them may be sitting right here among us. It's just you don't know which of them are insidious.

VADM Barrett: A very different problem set, yeah. But I'm also confident. I think our strategies are pretty sound. I think the country's pulled together very well. I think Coast Guard people, in particular in my set, are actually very good at what they do. So if we have resources and give them the tools, I think their judgment will be prudent. But it's a different problem set. We need to think that through carefully. That's one of the problems with this response. This was a problem up in Alaska for me as the District Commander and I suspect for all the District Commanders. One of the things we eviscerated were our planning staffs, okay? So it's not just the boat crews.

Q: Right.

VADM Barrett: It's like, we need really smart answers. We're not ever going to have enough assets to address all these things adequately on the water and in the air. We need to figure out how to do things differently. On air patrols, well can we get the Civil Air Patrol to do it? How can we integrate them? What are their restrictions? How many air asset hours can we have? How can we cover this problem set? We use Navy; all that stuff. We really need some smart thinking against these problems and buying people the time to think through it, to plan for it, to get the resources, but to really figure out how we're going to take on these threats. I thought it was a huge problem set for us. It's not enough . . . I used to tell this story with *Exxon Valdez* and I'll repeat it. Most of my Staff's already heard it. Prior to the *Exxon Valdez* hitting a blind reef there were 860 plus tanker transits in Prince William Sound with no accidents. Well then you have the *Exxon Valdez*. So what you've got is 99.9-percent success equals public outrage.

Q: Okay.

VADM Barrett: Now with the environment on terrorism, 99.9-percent success could equal total disastrous, tragic consequences. You can't have it. There's no room there. So we've really got to be smart about how we approach the problem, what resources we bring to bear, how we employ them, and that it's smart. And so I thought that was our biggest challenge, not even putting assets out on the water or doing the boardings, or putting the security zones in effect.

Briefing up our secure comms was a big issue and being able to talk secure. That's another . . . it's like the weapons we got out of . . . when I came in the Coast Guard as an ensign we handled a lot of classified traffic with the Navy. I used to get . . . when I was an ensign on *Chase* I would be issued a .45 and I would go off with usually a chief for classified material destructions. We would take our bags of classified material and we would take ourselves up to the Navy Station up there and we would watch our stuff. But we've got a gun. We've got bullets. We've got bags, and we went. But we were used to dealing with that type - not used too - but that environment was built in. Well I think we also eroded our ability to plan and execute these types of missions well and I think that was actually as big a problem set as the operation.

Q: The Reserve units I grew up in always played a big part in those contingency plans and exercises, and you had people; reserve officers, who came from all these different skills in civilian life who could use them in these Reserve exercises.

VADM Barrett: And we didn't have the plans on 9/11 to pull off the shelf.

Q: Does the Coast Guard, do you think now, have an appreciation that its officers need to think, just to have the time to do that?

VADM Barrett: I think it's still a challenge if you look at what's going on here. I'm looking at where I'm sitting here, which I haven't been here that long. We have the actual operational Homeland Security environment we're in. We have talked of a Presidential Proposal to move us to a part of a new

organization and stand up as part of a new Cabinet department. We have the desire around the world for increased . . . all the issues that go with Homeland Security and International Maritime Trade. We still have all the stuff going on; the AMIO, the counter-narcotics, the Cubans, the port safety, the Search and Rescue, NDRSMP bringing on Deep Water; the biggest procurement in our history. There's a lot going on and it actually reflects an awful lot of good work by people. But I think the environment - the challenge we just talked about is still there - is having enough people with enough time to think about what we're doing so that we do it very smart.

Q: Yes

VADM Barrett: I think we're conscious of it. I'm not sure we have enough time built into the organization yet to do it. The other thing - and this strikes me too - a lot of the thinking process and a lot of this mission ultimately comes down to people.

Q: Sure.

VADM Barrett: I think that's where we've . . . people are the most expensive asset we have. That's been that way for a number of years. That's one of the reasons people have been targets for doing more with less. Replace them with technology, and to a certain extent that's certainly true. You know the box on my desk, or the boxes, let me do stuff that: (A) I couldn't have done a few years ago, but, (B) would have been more intensive. But ultimately, having enough people to do these jobs is critical and I think that's something we're learning too; that we've learned again the hard way that . . . I think we called up the most Reserves by percentage of any Service after 9/11.

Q: Well neither VADM [Timothy J.] Josiah nor RADM [Robert D.] Sirois agree with this number. But the number I have from down in the subterranean depths of the organization are that we had 985 Reserves on Extended Active Duty on 9/10. And if that's true, when you add to that the 2,875 or whatever the final mobilization number was . . .

VADM Barrett: Thirty five hundred.

Q: . . .you had about 47 percent of the Reserve mobilized.

VADM Barrett: I think that's a good number.

Q: And one person I spoke with conceptualizes the Reserves in thirds; there's the third that will show up before they're called in a crisis. Then there's the third that shows up if they're called and then there's the third that you can't find whether you call them or not. So if you take that construct as a valid one, then that 47 percent probably is more like 70 to 80 percent of the Reserve.

VADM Barrett: Yeah, that's remarkable. I want to tell you one other story, which is not Reserve, it's another group I really haven't talked too, but it was very much obvious to me, which was Alaska Auxiliary, okay?

Q: Yes

VADM Barrett: Right after September 11th - this is like the 12th, a year ago - we had done a creative thing in Whittier, Alaska; that we stood up an Auxiliary Station. We purchased with Coast Guard funds, a RIB; a safe boat actually. It's got a cabin on it. I don't know if you're familiar with it; a 25-foot Safe Boat. We got a caboos from the Alaska railroad. In Whittier they opened a railroad tunnel in . . .

Q: I've seen that caboos, yeah, the Auxiliary Caboos.

VADM Barrett: Yeah, it was a little caboose and it was renovated. But we actually staffed what amounts to a summer station with the Auxiliary up there and it's their station. They run it. They built it. But we bought them the equipment. We provided the training. So it provided another SAR asset in Western Prince William Sound that we had not had before and also a Safety and Patrol asset.

Q: Yes

VADM Barrett: Well when 9/11 hit we had no small boat presence in Valdez and we sent a patrol boat up there right away, but if we had no station there. The MSO had no boats. There wasn't perceived to be a need for that kind of stuff. We've had a patrol boat in there just constantly since then.

Q: Will the MSO get a boat?

VADM Barrett: We've actually purchased and put in - I think they've got - we were moving for them to have four. I think we got them to two immediately, maybe three.

Q: That was one of the things that surprised me the most when I came on active duty. One of the first things I learned was that at times the Captain of the Port has to liaison with the Coast Guard to get across the harbor.

VADM Barrett: Yeah, well it was there. But we had no small boat in Valdez. The Auxiliary called up and we said, could we get the Auxiliary boat? These guys got a trailer down there, put this boat on the trailer, hauled it out of the water, raced out of Whittier, called their friends in the Alaska Highway Department to hold the tunnel open so we could get the boat through this railroad tunnel, and they had this boat on the water, on patrol, in Valdez, in, I want to say about 16 hours.

Q: That is terrific.

VADM Barrett: And I went to extraordinary lengths to do it. I remember calling up the Auxiliary Commodore, calling up the local Auxiliary Commander to thank them for their efforts, and I got this letter and it was fantastic. It was like, we were so happy to be able to help. It's like every other American. Are we asking too much of them? They're volunteers. We don't expect them . . . its like, no. They were so proud and pleased to be able to take on Al Qaeda or whoever else and to have a role in it.

Q: Yes.

VADM Barrett: But again, it's another extraordinary group of people with a lot of pretty unique talents that came to bear. It's, how can we help you? I had native tribal leaders - we had done some work with them - and one of the first e-mails I got on September 11th - I remember it was from the Native Village of Eak, which is in Prince William Sound - from the tribal leader there. I just want to let you know we're here, anyway we can help, we're here. You know it's really gratifying.

Q: Those are the ones you frame.

VADM Barrett: Yeah, it was terrific.

Q: Let me ask you two other people questions.

VADM Barrett: Sure.

Q: One is, I've asked, I think I've asked all the admirals this, is if every Marine's a rifleman, what's every Coast Guardsman?

VADM Barrett: A sailor, yeah, a sailor, and in a broad sense; if you keep it in a broad sense. I think you have to know and like the water, whether you fly over it, drive on it, inspect boats on it . . .

Q: It's your realm.

VADM Barrett: . . . it's your realm.

Q: Yes.

VADM Barrett: And if you're not comfortable in that realm I don't think you're going to be good at our job.

Q: One of the things that strikes me about Deepwater, in fact I asked this to RADM [Patrick] Stillman directly, was the sub-text of it. The sub-text of the technology seems to be fewer people; that in ten years or fifteen years, or whenever these assets come on line, that the Coast Guard might be half the size it is now. It seems to be that personnel are the big expense . . . it is, and wherever you can, cut people, then you look to do that. Is that your view as well? And I know we're having this big plus-up now, but do you see, again, a big drawdown in five or six years as technology presumably starts to replace a lot of these people?

VADM Barrett: No I don't, and I'll tell you why. I think because the drive is different. I think with Deepwater the drive is to have the right number of people. One of the problems we had with the last drawdown is they didn't change the mission suite and they didn't buy equipment. If you design a cutter so that it can run with fewer people and you have more sensor systems and more integrated technology and better Command and Control, and electronic charting and all those things, and that's built in, you can certainly operate that ship with fewer people, and you go to plug and play type concepts.

Q: Right.

VADM Barrett: Okay, if we're going to put this ship out for pollution response we're going to parachute in 12 people with this set of skills. If we're going to do law enforcement boardings we're going to do this. If we're doing fisheries enforcement we're going to do this; at least for your planned missions. You've always got to have the organic capability. I think you can operate with less people. If 50 percent - I'd say 50 is probably the wrong number - but if some percentage of your air mission can be done with UAVs instead of helicopters with people, are you going to need helicopters with people? Yes, but maybe you don't need the double crew if part of the flight hours can be run by a UAV. But if it's built in from the ground up I think you get to the right number of people for the mission.

Q: Yes

VADM Barrett: Why I don't think the Coast Guard will shrink is because our mission suite keeps expanding.

Q: Yes

VADM Barrett: You're still going to have to put . . . we're going to commission 12 MSSTs. That's a lot of people. I don't see the need for them going away. You're going to see more inspection requirements, more Domain Awareness requirements. SAR is probably a good example too. Even if we get better at safety functions and there are less SAR cases, you've got to have the capability to launch the aircraft, or the cutter, for the case that you need it. So the capability doesn't go away. But I don't see Deepwater as affecting numbers of people, and I think the need for our services is more acknowledged now, and I do think it's a people intensive effort. Ultimately you need people on the ground, and you look at what's going on with law enforcement, transportation security and administration. What are we talking of having; forty to fifty thousand people from nothing?

Q: Yes.

VADM Barrett: A lot of people. And redundancy is important. You have screeners that miss stuff at airports. We build in a lot of . . . it's checks. It's cockpit coordination. The people are checking each other in what they're doing. Our boat crews operate the same way. You can't run a boat crew with two people if you pull people out of the water. You just can't do it.

Q: To say nothing of the people that you need back home doing all their paperwork.

VADM Barrett: Well maybe you can economize there, but it's all downloading.

Q: Yes.

VADM Barrett: No, I don't see that as a, I think the right side. The Reserve's going to grow. I see that balance as swinging up.

Q: Finally Sir, I just want to give you a chance to add anything that you'd like, and as well, to say where you would put 9/11 in the lineage of Coast Guard events, say, since the Second World War, Vietnam, the drug war and *Valdez*.

VADM Barrett: I think each time has its series of events and there are things that . . . but I think what 9/11 did for the Coast Guard . . . many of the things that shaped the Coast Guard also shaped the national consciousness. So I think its events that shape the national consciousness also affect us; that are the banners. World War II: huge; Pearl Harbor: the entire war effort; the Korean War: it was a forgotten war. It didn't shape our consciousness at the time. It didn't shape the Coast Guard at the time. Vietnam really didn't shape our consciousness other than . . . it didn't shape the Coast Guard other than the national problem anyway. On the other hand something like *Exxon Valdez* I think did. It led to legislation. It increased our size. It led to focus on the environment. 9/11; it probably ten-folded the *Exxon Valdez*. We had a lot of people killed in a very visible way. But I think it was like Pearl Harbor. That was the conversation I was having with my wife when we saw the TV clips of the first plane as it hit. I said, this is Pearl Harbor all over again. That's my view on what happened. I think that's been borne out. I think the risk is that it's a more insidious war than Pearl Harbor. It's going to go on for a longer time. It's going to go up and down.

Q: There's no obvious enemy to deal with.

VADM Barrett: That's right. So I think the challenge for the country and for the Coast Guard is . . . I was talking to Deepwater; this NDIA thing, the other day is, we go to war every day.

Q: Yes.

VADM Barrett: Now the enemies are different today. Our enemy was always the sea, or our friend. But I mean it's our challenge.

Q: Sure.

VADM Barrett: But drugs, AMIO; the Coast Guard goes to war every day. Now we're going to go to war with a very, very different enemy.

END OF INTERVIEW

