



U.S. Coast Guard Oral History Program

Attack on America: September 11, 2001 and the U.S. Coast Guard

U.S. COAST GUARD ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
Operation Noble Eagle Documentation Project

**Interviewee: Vice Admiral Thad W. Allen, USCG
Commander, Atlantic Area & Fifth Coast Guard
District**



Interviewer: PAC Peter Capelotti, USCGR
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Q: I'm here in the office of the Commander of the Atlantic Area; Admiral Thad Allen, and Brandon McPherson, his PAO [Public Affairs Officer], is here with us as well. Sir, its March 22nd, 2002. We're about nine months removed from when you came onboard as the Commander in last June, so you didn't have a whole lot of time on the job. They didn't give you a whole lot of time on the job before 9/11 got dropped in your lap. Can you give me a sense of the operational tempo in the area before 9/11? Was it something that you thought was stressing on the cutters, the aircraft, the boats, and so forth, or was it something that you thought that we could maintain over, or was being maintained, was being sustained?

VADM Allen: Well you can only do the level of mission with the resources you have. You can't make wine out of water. The two main stressors before 9/11 were the migrant and the drug mission and I had just come from being the 7th District Commander so I was fully aware of the implications, and most of the cutter time in the Atlantic area fleet was being devoted down to the 7th District. We were the major claimant on all the resource hours. So before 9/11 the dominant missions were drugs and migrants.

Q: Yes. Was the kind of port security that happened almost overnight on 9/11, was that on the radar screen at all for you guys?

VADM Allen: You could find glimpses of it here and there, but to be truthful I would say no. The reason is that any pre-planning that we might have done for one of these types of events we didn't execute to those plans on 9/11. (Laughter)

Q: Yes. Well that's a good point Sir, which brings me to 9/11. Do you recall where you were that morning?

VADM Allen: I was getting a physical at ISC [Integrated Support Command] Portsmouth.

Q: Uh huh, and how were you contacted that morning?

VADM Allen: My aide walked in - she was in the break room with a corpsman - and said that a plane had just flown into the World Trade Center, and I was, I think, having blood drawn.

Q: When did it become an emergency? When did you know that you had to get back here?

VADM Allen: Well when the first plane hit I called back to the Operations Center just to get a kind of a status on what was going on. At that point I was supposed to go down right after that and actually give out some awards on a cutter that was tied up at ISC Portsmouth. When the first plane hit I just got a little bit of an update and then my intention was to go on down and finish my business at ISC. When the second plane hit I told my aide, tell them I'm coming back.

Q: When you got back here what did you find?

VADM Allen: Well I went to the Ops Center and found out what was going on; that basically we had closed the Port of New York. We were looking to try and gain some situational awareness. We immediately closed the port in the Potomac River above the Woodrow Wilson Bridge.

Q: Was that your decision? Did that come down from you?

VADM Allen: Captain of the Ports [COTP] locally. It would be Captain [Roger B.] Peoples in Baltimore who has control over Washington and [Rear] Admiral [Richard] Bennis - who you may have already spoken to - in New York.

Q: I haven't yet but I'm going to, yes Sir. As the information started coming in, how did you conceive your role that morning? I mean it was your Area that was under attack essentially. When did you realize that morning that your area was under attack? When did it become clear?

VADM Allen: Well our operational model has the District Commanders having the primary responsibility, and at least the post-9/11 model was that the Captain of the Ports have autonomous authority in the ports to deal with exigencies. In fact they have significant law enforcement authority to close the port, to protect the facilities, and things like that. So in the immediate aftermath I think we intuitively reacted as we always do in the Coast Guard. You surge to meet the event, and based on the situation the particular Captain of the Ports found in the ports, they reacted. In this case it was more significant in Washington and New York than in other places. I do believe, if memory serves correctly, we closed Boston for a short while only because the planes that had gone out of there. There was little lack of situational awareness of how the whole situation was unfolding. But pretty much the immediate reaction on ground was done by the Captain of the Ports themselves based on their authority. I was more in a monitoring stage to see how things were unfolding and then starting to assess the impact of what was going on, and then basically carving out what the Area role should be.

Q: When did you become confident of your situational awareness, or did you that first day?

VADM Allen: I'm still not.

Q: Did you call Washington or did Washington call you? Did the Boss call you and say, I need to know what's going on? When did you first make contact with Headquarters?

VADM Allen: It was within a couple of hours I called the Commandant. I was waiting to see what was happening, and then the next thing was how we should create an organizational response to this. [Rear] Admiral [George] Nacarra and I had a couple of conversations.

Q: Before you talked to the Commandant?

VADM Allen: Well it was kind of ongoing.

Q: Right.

VADM Allen: There was a template out there on how to respond to a major regional disaster and that was the National Incident Command System. It was developed following OPA 90 [Oil Pollution Act of 1990], and one of the immediate conversations that Admiral Nacarra and I had was whether or not this was going to be what we would call an Incident of National Significance that would require us to basically put a senior flag officer in there to manage what was going on. I ultimately didn't do that at my level because we had a flag officer in New York. Because of Admiral Bennis' health situation he had been retained there. For a short while Admiral Nacarra actually deployed to New York to create, if we needed it, a Regional Incident Command there. It was clear after a few days that he had commitments in Boston and some other things to do, so he actually migrated back to Boston and we just left the Command and Control to local level. What evolved within a matter of hours and in the first couple of days was a twice-day conference call with all the impacted parties and then a couple of days later it shifted to a single call. I think it was four in the afternoon. I would have a call at two o'clock with all my District Commanders and we would start out with Admiral Bennis then Admiral Nacarra giving an update, then everybody else would report on what was going on. When that was done we would roll into a teleconference with the Commandant, me, Admiral Bennis and Admiral Nacarra. And for the first week and a half or two weeks that was a daily occurrence. So we were really plugged in tight.

Q: What were your thoughts that morning?

VADM Allen: Well you're conflicted. You've got the national psyche being impacted and, you know, the country's been attacked, and the personal thing you go through. It's like, what is the organizational response? My initial response to the whole thing especially after we closed New York Harbor and weren't sure when it was going to be opened was to go back to some of the experiences I had in dealing with major oil spills as the Captain of the Port. And the maxim there is when you have oil hitting the water it's going to be a significant event. The first thing you do is take half your people and send them home because otherwise, 24 hours later, everybody drops.

Q: Right.

VADM Allen: I would say within an hour of really understanding this was going to be a significant event I was thinking about sustainment; whether or not we were going to be able to pull this off for any extended period of time with the closure of New York and then what was going to be involved after that.

Q: Was there a time that day when you thought about pulling back some of your forces because you knew you were going to need them later, because it seems like the model that day was they threw in everything they had?

VADM Allen: Well what happened was that we diverted every major cutter that was underway to a port and then got some underway that weren't on patrol and we ended up with three large cutters in New York Harbor. That was done for a couple of reasons. The first reason was to make sure we gained situational awareness of what was going on on-scene. The second thing was to create a Task Organization or a Command and Control capability where we didn't have it. We had adequate Command and Control capability in New York but we needed more assets there just because of the tactical situation. But in places like Hampton Roads and Wilmington - post 9/11 - the supported Commander, if you will, was the Captain of the Port. They were the ones with the legal authority. They were the ones who were going to be able to direct any kind of action which was to be going on in the port. But Captains of the Ports do not have resources. They don't have Command Centers.

Q: Something I've just learned since coming on active duty.

VADM Allen: You know unless they're in an Activity or co-located with a Group they're usually in a leased building and their communications is through a Nextel phone. So my first thought was to position cutters off ports that we were concerned about because we couldn't do every port and then use them for Command and Control situational awareness as an extension of the eyes and ears of the Captain of the Port, and be able to execute tasking for the Captain of the Port. So the first bridge strategy was to get those cutters in place so we would have a Command and Control capability up and down the coast.

Q: It's unusual for somebody, I think, on the outside to think about the Coast Guard liaising with the Coast Guard in essence by having cutters talking to the Captains of the Port. But that's, in essence, the system we have. Is that right?

VADM Allen: Not everywhere. I don't know how much you want to get into this. Maybe we can talk about it again later. But one of the things that 9/11 brought to light in the Coast Guard was that a bunch of organizational experiments that we had done early on and never resolved to get a corporate solution on became a little bit of an Achilles' Heel after 9/11. We had done some experiments in New York and other places establishing combined "O" [Operational] and "M" [Marine Safety] commands. I told everybody if this had to happen it was a good thing that it happened in New York because we had the right command for the response that was needed in the Harbor that day. But we have other places - and the poster children are Wilmington and Savannah - where you have Captain of the Ports at major ports, including loadout ports for military operations, that are co-located with a group and the nearest operational unit is a small boat station that's 12 miles down the mouth of a river; either Oak Island or Tybee Island in the case of Savannah. In those places . . . it was virtually impossible for them to carry out any kind of a coordinated operation because they didn't have either capability or Command and Control.

Therefore cutters were the immediate solution in that, and the first significant tactical decision I made was to place cutters outside the ports.

Q: I do want to return to that point in a minute. When you came in that day . . . I want to talk a little bit about leadership. Paul Fussell has a quote something on the order of that the role of an officer in a crisis is to seem what you would be and the strategy for dealing with fear is ultimately rhetorical and theatrical. You need to, in essence, adopt an attitude that will strike your audience as fearless in the hope that you'll be imitated. You're a three-star Admiral. Do you have . . . you must have a sense that people don't react normally when you're around or they're not themselves. They're uptight. They're on edge. They want to impress you. They want to do whatever. Do you have that self-awareness and are you aware of the affect that your presence has on them, and did you think that you had to be a certain person that day?

VADM Allen: Commander McPherson's already starting to laugh at this answer. Let me preface it with a comment, okay. I most likely am an anomaly in the flag corps. I'll tell you what my own personal perception is. But if you really want to understand what happened that day you should go find anybody in this building and just ask them. A personal answer to you from my own personal assessment is I behaved no different that morning than I am right now. If I am fearless I'm fearless all the time.

Q: But is that the way you feel, or felt that this was something that didn't . . .?

VADM Allen: Well first of all I had no problems about my own personal security. I wasn't overwhelmed with fear on behalf of the country. I guess my first reaction; my intuitive reaction and my gut reaction, was that this was an anomalous situation. That I didn't think it was part of a larger pattern, but I couldn't discount it. Therefore we had to react tactically as if there might have been some more things coming down the line and we didn't know whether they were ever going to happen or not because they grounded the air fleet. But as far as my personal security or a feeling of fear, I think you know what happens is the adrenalin kicks in and you're so on task that it's not an issue.

Q: But I think by the end of that day it became clear that if this was an anomaly it was a hell of an anomaly. That whoever these folks were they had been able to take four planes almost simultaneously.

VADM Allen: I agree; well coordinated, well planned, everything else. I'm not saying it wasn't significant. I guess what I'm saying was I wasn't overcome by the magnitude of the event where it paralyzed or impacted my thinking. I was treating it like I would a major catastrophe because we get involved in those over our career a lot. This was an order of magnitude that nobody could imagine. But nonetheless you get on task and you start working.

Q: Order of magnitude, yes, but also character was different. I mean you folks, I think, as the leader of maritime defense down here train to repel navies or defend against submarine attacks, missile attacks, those kinds of things. This was, I think, of a different character. Was it the nature of the attack that surprised you or did . . .?

VADM Allen: Well first of all it wasn't a maritime event.

Q: Right.

VADM Allen: It turned into a maritime event in New York.

Q: Was that because of the nature of New York and the evacuation and all that?

VADM Allen: Well it's the proximity to the waterfront facilities and then the isolation of New York and the fact that people had to be evacuated, and the fact that the Pentagon sits on the Potomac River. The second and third order consequences of the events became maritime events and because of that we

were drawn into them and those venues. But beyond that it was a national security event, one that we had to take notice of because we didn't know whether or not it was going to present a risk in our area of work. But it was not a maritime event to begin with, and because of that I guess I was approaching it a little more clinically rather than emotionally.

Q: You were able to be detached because of that?

VADM Allen: Well hopefully whenever . . . as the level of gravity of an incident mounts or the level of risk mounts I think the more - maybe detached is not the right word - but you've got to keep pretty cool and you've just got to not get excited about everything. And I think I was in that mode, but maybe Commander McPherson could throw in a comment.

CDR McPherson: The one thing that struck me is I think you saw the whole range in the phone conferences from people dealing with it in different ways. And the other thing I mentioned to the Chief is that I think early on everybody had good reason to think that they were going to be the next target, whether it was Boston or Miami or someplace else.

VADM Allen: Well the whole response was port-centric by the Coast Guard. It was port centric for a lot of reasons. That's how our commands are created. The Captain of Port authority was the central authority we were dealing within our response and everybody immediately became aware just intuitively and by visual inspection of their vulnerabilities and the risks that were involved. If you're in Savannah you're looking at the LNG [Liquid Natural Gas] facility at Elba Island. If you're sitting at Hampton Roads it's the largest naval fleet concentration in the world. If you're in Miami its five million cruise ship passengers a year, and if you're down in the 8th District it's the fact that just leaving Houston and going down the ship channel you have 23 miles of incendiary devices. So everybody had . . . and in the Great Lakes it was the Sears Tower and the vulnerability of Chicago on the waterfronts. So everybody took what they saw, created a mental template and then applied it to their own port and said, all right, what would happen if it happened here, and that was driving a lot of behavior.

Q: That behavior, if there was any frustration out of those scenarios that were being spun, was it because the Captains of the Port couldn't militarize, let's say, overnight, or didn't have the capability to, say, defend some of those assets?

VADM Allen: Well I think that's a problem even today. I've told everybody since 9/11, and I started telling them this within days if not hours after the event, that water is different. That 95,000 miles of coastline – it's ubiquitous - and if you discount the fact that some maniac can fly a plane into a building or that a guy may run out of gas and have to land on a freeway, planes only land and take off at airports. Rail cars stay on rails and cars, for the most part, stay on roads. As I've told a lot of audiences in the local area, it takes an inner tube and a pair of flippers to enter our world of work, and it is completely porous. Plus there is a history of freedom of navigation and use of the waters. If an Algerian ship with known terrorists onboard wants to transit from Halifax to Havana, Cuba and stay 15 miles off the United States the entire route under international law, unless we've got a reason to go onboard and do anything, they can make that transit.

Q: If they come within 15 miles do we have the capability of dealing with it?

VADM Allen: If you can demonstrate a legal cause to go aboard them you can. But the point I'm trying to make here is the freedom of navigation and shared use of the waterways makes the water different than any other medium, and therefore you're faced with basically an unsolvable problem when you look at harbor security. It was that way on 9/11. It's that way today, and it's a policy issue we still haven't come to grips with in the country.

Q: In that policy issue, is it our job to defeat these people if they attack our ports, the Coast Guard I mean?

VADM Allen: Well it's America's job to defeat them. It's no . . . see, especially in a post-Cold War–Nichols environment, no particular agency or service has the unique responsibility to defend the country. We do it through combatant commanders and chiefs and joint task forces. That's the way we fight wars now. What we don't have is a paradigm for dealing with the defense of our ports because that broke down on 9/11 and the MDZ [Maritime Defense Zone] command structure that was created during the Cold War was largely irrelevant at that time. And one of the big challenges right now in standing up the U.S. Northern Command or the Homeland CINC, is devising a Command and Control structure in a way to fight our ports, if you will, post 9/11.

Q: And we're still in that process now of figuring out how we're going to do that?

VADM Allen: Yes.

Q: So the Coast Guard's role in whatever that becomes is still very much uncertain in your mind?

VADM Allen: Well what's going to have to happen is . . . I'm getting into policy stuff that has nothing to do with the response of 9/11, but . . .

Q: Sure. No, I should explain that part of my charter is . . . this is one of the reasons why . . . one of the things that triggered my interest in reforming the history program is that my charter includes gathering all documentation regarding 9/11, writing a manuscript related too it to include the 9/11 response and all Coast Guard policy decisions that sprang from it, and its going to be on the Captain's desk on October 1st.

VADM Allen: Well the succession of policy decisions taken within the Coast Guard as they relate to the larger context of what happened outside the Coast Guard is a fascinating case study in government and in of itself.

Q: Absolutely.

VADM Allen: And what happened was we were, in some cases, way out ahead of everybody else in government because our unique abilities and capabilities to respond to these types of things, and we were out there just doing our business like it was a major oil spill or something else, although a higher magnitude. Every port was working this national emergency minutes after it happened, and because of that there were things that we decided early on that had sub-sequentially been over taken by the Office of Homeland Security being established; the new Homeland CINC being established.

Q: Is it fair to assume that we don't want 361 different Port Protection Plans; that there's going to be some kind of unified way to defend ports, or are they going to be port specific?

VADM Allen: No, I think . . . well the ultimate performance criteria that I've told my folks is that every port in the country should feel that they have the same level of security applied to them in the following sense. That we come up with a base set of criteria for assessing a port and what needs to be done at certain security levels. We apply that criteria to a port to produce the plan that will result in different outcomes in different ports because they don't all have the same vulnerabilities and threats. There's not a fleet concentration in every port. There's not an LNG facility in every port. But you come up with a standard way to assess vulnerabilities and create security plans so that every port is treated equally, although the outcomes may be different.

Q: With the exception of these loadout questions that were handled during the Cold War, is it safe to assume that the senior leadership of the Coast Guard hasn't had to deal with port security at this level since the Second World War?

VADM Allen: Yes.

Q: The second part of that question is, are you able, as a senior leader in the Coast Guard, to go back to their experience? Are there any studies that you have looked at the way things were handled then; lessons learned, what the Captains of the Port, what the Coast Guard did in the Second World War that might be used as a model?

VADM Allen: I thought a little bit about that. I think it maybe useful at some point to go back and compare what we did and what happened then. But I think the changes in communications technology and the complexity of the ports are all so much different now that the paradigm will probably break down. I didn't use that as anything that I thought was helpful.

Q: Right. I want to go back to the leadership question. What were you looking for from the Commandant that day?

VADM Allen: Well I think in the first 24 hours I probably wasn't looking for much from the Commandant nor should I have been. I was trying to take my units and apply them to the highest needs that I had at the time and manage the tactical picture on-scene. As situational awareness developed, then it was for me to go back and tell him, here's what I've assessed. Here's what I've done and here's what I need from you. And I think that unfolded in the following days especially in these daily teleconferences, which were terrific. It was the best laboratory of human behavior I've ever seen in an organization. We were never tighter in doing things with total visibility, vertically up and down the organization, as when we had those daily teleconferences. We lost something when we stopped them.

Q: We lost something when we didn't record them.

VADM Allen: I have a book at home of my notes for the first of couple weeks. They're kind of cryptic. I will try and find them and give them to you.

Q: Yeah, I have the Commandant's notes from those first couple weeks and they're interesting. In fact he has a sticky note on top of them that he sent to Captain [David P.] Pekoski saying, you might want to hold onto these. These might be valuable for something or other. And I'm thinking, here's that response you're talking about in a nutshell. This is clearly a permanent historic record. What did you feel like you had to provide him? Did he ask you, or what did he say to you? Did you have direct conversations with him?

VADM Allen: Well you have to understand the organizational relationships. District Commanders run operations and Captain of the Ports run operations in the ports. As the Area Commander I am a resource broker. I resolve policy issues across Districts and I'm involved with resource claimants and resolving those issues on where we're going to put the big resources; the ones that I own, which are our long-range aircraft and cutters. This was a port centric response, so to some extent I'm a District Commander and I can tell you what I did in the 5th District. As the Area Commander I was more concerned with how we were applying resources where they needed to flow and in consistency and response across the Districts, which we're still struggling with. So the things that I would go to the Commandant with would be policy issues regarding what would need to be resolved for our responses in the ports as they related to an area wide focus, and then resource issues associated with where the cutters were being deployed.

Q: Were those policy questions coming up to you from the COTPs and the District Commanders, or were you asking them what's going on there, what help do you need, and so forth and so on? I mean how were you keeping apprised of what the Captain of the . . . if your job here is to . . .?

VADM Allen: Well we went immediately to a daily situation, reporting via messages. Everybody stood up either Incident Management Teams or Crisis Action Cells in all the Districts. And so basically Command and Control structures sprang up within 12 hours. You were talking about what I did immediately after I

got back to the building. The first thing we did was we stood up an Incident Management Team to be able to take this on. We established different cells. We got a 12-hour on 12-hour off watch rotation. Within 24 hours we basically had set up an ad hoc Homeland Security Command Cell, and everybody did that; every District did it.

Q: When did you start to think that this was going to be more than just a blip on the screen for the Coast Guard, or did you?

VADM Allen: Oh, I thought it within 24-hours.

Q: Did you, and what proceeded from that, that awareness?

VADM Allen: I sent a message and we probably need to get you a copy of it. Here was my problem. It relates back to our organizational structure and the fact that we were not prepared organizationally or structurally organized to be able to respond to this as well as we needed to. I knew this was a port centric response and it might develop into something else later. But the thing was, according to the operations at the port level and trying to do it with some semblance of continuity across all the Districts, I sent out a message basically saying, I want you to come back and tell me how you're going to do the following - and we can give you the message. It has details in it. But what I wanted to be able to do was I wanted to be able to flow resources to ports that needed them. But I wanted to be able to be assured that the Captain of the Port would be able to execute tasks by having a Command and Control structure that would create the capabilities for him to do that. So I went to every District Commander and I said, all right, here's what I want. I want you to come back and tell me how you're going to execute tasks, and if I'm going to assign you resources, how you're going to manage those resources and how you're going to use Command and Control. When you tell me that and I get the template then I'll know where I can send resources, and if you can't do it, then I shouldn't be assigning resources that aren't going to do you any good.

Q: So you guys were under a lot of pressure to get these?

VADM Allen: And I didn't mandate how to do it because I had activities, I had groups and MSOs [Marine Safety Offices] co-located, and then I had them where they weren't co-located. But I said, you give me a task execution model and then I will tell you how we're going to distribute the resources. And they all came back with a slightly different model but they all did basically the same thing. For instance, if you went to the Great Lakes in the 9th District, they went out - and because of the unique geographical boundaries in the Great Lakes - they created sectors. And within that sector [Rear] Admiral [James D.] Hull designated one person to be the Sector Commander and that became their organizational structure. They fused and unified their commands. They designated a single Command Center and then all of the operational reporting came out of that Sector Commander. In some cases it was an MSO CO. In some cases it was a Group Commander. It depended on where they were located and their capability. In the 8th District, [Rear] Admiral [Roy J.] Casto did kind of the same thing, except he created Task Units; CTUs. And so if you went down to the Houston/Galveston area, he took MSO Port Arthur, MSO Houston, Group Galveston and BTS Houston, put them together and had them operate as a task unit and it was Task Unit with some number behind it. So if I wanted to send a cutter down to station them off Houston/Galveston I could chop them to CTU XXXX.

Q: Right.

VADM Allen: Okay. Here in the 5th District we basically organized them by Captain of the Port zones and they were regional, and then wherever you went they came back and said, all right, here's how I'm organized to execute the mission. I said, fine, and here's what I'm going to do. And what I did was where they didn't have enough Command and Control, at least for the first couple of weeks, that was my priority where to assign those cutters. So I kind of came up with an ad hoc way to create an Operational Response Model.

Q: I want to try to boil this down a little bit. The cutters, to you, essentially acted as sort of emergency Command and Control fusion centers, if you will, for the Captains of the Ports.

VADM Allen: Exactly. Forty platforms Command and Control, and created an operating picture because they had radars and sensors.

Q: And would you communicate through the cutters to get messages out, or how would you do that?

VADM Allen: No. They were there to support the Captain of the Port. The Captain of the Port was the supported Commander.

Q: For the Captain of the Ports communications.

VADM Allen: So what it allowed the Captain of the Port to do was, you know, we evolved into this . . . we immediately went to a 96-hour notification of port shipping and those lists were being vetted and then we had to figure out who we're going to board and who we weren't going to board. The Captain of the Port did all of that, then he could task the cutter as his supporting Operational Commander to keep situational awareness of what was going on in the harbor and then deploy boarding teams and manage all that for him. Now in New York we really didn't need to do that because they had a VTS [Vessel Traffic Safety center] and a Group co-located. What we needed the cutters in New York for was just to control different sectors of the harbor because it was complex harbor. But in places like Hampton Roads and in Wilmington those cutters offshore became the floating operation centers for the Captain of the Port.

Q: Do you see the Captains of the Port, this whole issue of communications control and so forth being, is that on your plate now as far as either the, or a big issue?

VADM Allen: Huge, big time, a big issue for the new Commandant. I have told people repeatedly since 9/11, on 9/11 our Command and Control structure for shore operations at Coast Guard was rendered obsolete. Some people are going to figure it out tomorrow. Some people figured it out yesterday. Some people won't figure it at all and have to retire. Our shore Command and Control structure is obsolete.

Q: Now we have this big program to upgrade platforms on the rubric of Deepwater, this C4ISR [Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance], but that hasn't applied or wasn't applied to the Captains of the Port. I assume that this is a model that is going to have to be set up?

VADM Allen: One of the things that happened after Deepwater that I think was something that was very savvy the Commandant and the Vice Commandant did, they put together a study team to assess our current acquisitions that were in progress and see where they were impacted by post 9/11 events or lessons learned, and they picked three acquisitions they needed to focus on: Deepwater, the National Distress and Response System, which is a replacement for the VHF-FM, and there's some other capability embedded in that. The final was the Ports and Waterways Safety System, which was the successor program to our VTS program that we had a couple of years ago. It was very clear that all those tied together somehow for Command and Control and how we manage operational tasks in the littoral area and offshore. And because of that they went through and they did an analysis, and there's actually been a document that's been published about what we need to do about each one of these acquisitions, post 9/11.

Q: And you see them inter-operating now much more than they did before. Would that be fair to say?

VADM Allen: Yeah, oh yeah. We will have VTSs where we hadn't had them before because the VTS program was premised on reducing marine casualties and therefore a threat to the environment. And the existing mandate to build VTS is contained in the Oil Pollution Act of 1990, which was based on the

Exxon Valdez incident. We now have to look at VTS and Ports and Waterways Safety Systems as having a security dimension now, which means some ports are going to be more important than they were before, i.e., Hampton Roads, Mayport/Jacksonville and San Diego where you have major fleet concentrations and Force Protection becomes an issue.

Q: I want to show you, this is from an abstract of operations graphic put together; total hours in the first four days. It was showing a baseline at September 10th and then the first three days, I'm sure, is this from where you're looking from your height, is this what you are seeing as well, or sensing from the field, and this is for the cutters?

VADM Allen: Yeah.

Q: Not just the increase in hours but the overnight shift and mission as well.

VADM Allen: Sure, we made a left turn. That's to be expected and that's not surprising. We have prided ourselves on being multi-missioned and being able to transform to whatever the country needed us to be. We're an organizational chameleon. We can be whatever color anybody wants us to be for the mission at hand. We brilliantly executed a multi-mission about face on 9/11 to do what the country needed us to do. I'm not surprised, and it supports what we actually did.

Q: Were you concerned about these burn rates?

VADM Allen: Immediately. Remember I told you, I think I started talking within one day about how we're going to sustain this. It gets back to send half your people home to sleep, and I immediately started leaning on the Operational Commanders and the District Commanders to be realistic about their force levels out there. I'll give you a good example. You're sitting in a bunker. The enemy's coming at you and you have a hundred rounds of ammunition. How do you do it? When they come at you do you fire all of it until it's done and then you hope you get the job done and they don't come again, or do you establish a 100 yard parameter and you use one bullet each time somebody goes in there? Those are the kinds of things people were literally faced with. So you can understand the metaphor following 9/11. And each District Commander reacted to them differently and each Port Captain reacted to them differently, and because of that you would go some places and people were using a cooler hand.

Q: Yes.

VADM Allen: And all of this is based on their cumulative experiences and their own personal view of what was going on; a sense of urgency in the country. And some of them were even acting viscerally and emotionally to it, some other people were a little cooler. Neither one was right or wrong but it created a mixed bag of responses. There was one MSO CO, I won't name him, who had previously been involved with overseas operations with DoD [Department of Defense] and was familiar with [USS] *Cole*-like events [DDG-67] and what could happen. He took a command that was basically out in the middle of nowhere and created the equivalent of a PSU [Port Security Unit] and was doing seven-by-24 patrols up and down the waterway. There was no way in the world where you were going to be able to sustain that and so the question is once you get to that level, you know, we had issues about public expectations, strengths and strategies. And since 9/11 we've done a lot as far as trying to manage that. What I've tried to tell my District Commanders is you can't expect people to do anything more than what they're capable of or what the boats are capable of and you can't push these people beyond that. You've got to husband your resources and that's not being unpatriotic. It's not making poor tactical decisions. In fact it probably makes great decisions. You only expend all your ammunition when you're faced with a threat and you've got to keep firing because you've got no reason. We were doing things almost on a preemptive basis because we weren't sure where the National threat was. And to this date you can bring any intelligence person in here and ask them is there a credible maritime threat and the answer since 9/11 until this morning has been no. Now what does that mean? It means we don't know what we don't know. There

was no credible threat before 9/11 to the World Trade Centers and it happened, so it means we won't get any notice for a maritime event. The intelligence community is not going to help us.

Q: Exactly. I was going to say it seems to put the burden on you not to get caught with your pants down.

VADM Allen: Impossible. Ninety five thousand miles, inner tube, flippers, impossible.

Q: Yes sir.

VADM Allen: You apply your resources to the highest known threats, vulnerabilities, consequences and potential consequences as you can. We've been doing that traditionally in the Coast Guard for a number of years, and if you have a low probability, high consequence event, then you get up and you explain your actions and if you can articulate you're applying your resources the best way you could before the fact, you're going to be all right. If you were winging it then you get hoisted on your own petard.

CDR McPherson: But that's exactly what you've said Admiral since the day you took command here nine months ago.

VADM Allen: Well that's the reason I was telling him earlier that I think I didn't act any different after 9/11 than I did before. I'm me, I'm me, I'm me. You know, I'm Popeye. I am what I am.

Q: As Bill Parsell says, you are what you are.

VADM Allen: Yeah.

Q: The same thing. Here are the first four months; the initial surge and the cutter hours.

VADM Allen: Well first of all I have a background in budgeting.

Q: So you see these all the time?

VADM Allen: Well no. If you want to talk about abstract ops we can have another three-hour conversation. Its suspect data, but generally it's pointing in the right direction.

Q: Well the first question I had for that Lieutenant Commander who e-mailed me and said, we've got all of this AOPS [Abstract of Operations] stuff, and when he showed it to me I said, this is the mother load for the historian. But we did get one thing.

VADM Allen: Just remember you're dealing with a 60-percent solution here.

Q: He claims 95-percent.

VADM Allen: He needs to come see me. There are small boat stations, because of lack of connectivity, who bolted this together every month or so, go up to the Group office and input it because they can't dial up from where they're at, so.

Q: Well you're talking to somebody who's been on active duty for three-and-a-half months and I still don't have a computer Sir. So you don't have to explain those things to me.

VADM Allen: Anyway, take the abstract ops as general tendencies.

Q: Right. But even as a general trend it seems to suggest that the cutters were back pretty much to the September 10th level within about three weeks, at least in terms of hours.

VADM Allen: That's because the way we schedule cutters versus the way we run small boats.

Q: Could you explain that?

VADM Allen: Sure. We schedule cutters by days away from homeport a year; 185 days. So if you're on a 270 you can expect that 185 days a year you'll be away from homeport. We didn't bend any of those rules for 9/11. We just employed them in different missions.

Q: Right. But once those days are burned . . .

VADM Allen: That's it.

Q: They go back to the port. Is that right?

VADM Allen: Well no. They're scheduled 185 days a year to the extent that we use them up early in the Fiscal Year. They'll do less patrolling. By the time that the year 2001 is over they'll all have 185 days. Now some maybe 180, some maybe up to 190. There'll be some variation around that. But the cutters and the long-range aircraft have programmed effort packages that we just apply to a different mission. People that own small boats - because we don't manage small boats by programmed hours - in other words, if you have a boat at a station we don't say you've got a thousand hours on this boat for the year and once you hit that you can't run them anymore. So what they did was they took flexible capacity that had no organizational governors on how much they used and they shot all 100 rounds.

Q: Somebody told me recently that they're already spending Fiscal Year 04 money on their small boats.

VADM Allen: And that's not true either. These guys are saying we ran out of money and that's not true. There's a lot of money in the Coast Guard if you know where to get it. In fact we fixed some problems where these guys had done that, then we couldn't tell, I wasn't going to tell anybody because you expended your entire year's allowance of money and gas for small boats in the first three months that you're not going to do anything for the last nine months, no. You find the money for it.

CDR McPherson: I think maybe an interesting way to look at it - and I've heard this analogy made before - is that the small boat stations run like a firehouse for the most part. The boats are in wait and they get the call and they go. The cutters are out patrolling more like the policemen in the community. So for them to patrol a different community, a different area of the neighborhood, it's not a big impact. But when you pull the fire truck out of the firehouse and it's driving around the town all day, now it gets burned up fast.

VADM Allen: Great analogy.

Q: But there's also this kind of trichotomy in the Coast Guard where you've got the "M" tradition out of the Steamboat Inspection Service and so forth and then you've got the cutters from the Revenue Cutter Service, and then you've got the life savers coming out of small boat stations. It seems like that's "trichotomy," if you want to call it that, is still with us in many respects.

VADM Allen: Less than it was before 9/11. I would tell you right now - and you could check me by going out and talking to the deck plates around here - there is more of an appetite to reorganize and solve these Command and Control problems at the port level, at the working level in the Coast Guard now than there ever has been before. And if we don't take advantage of that and fix this we're making a bad management mistake.

Q: Well to give you one example. One of the Strike Team guys was telling me he's driving this 32-footer around New York Harbor and one of the cutters calls to them and said, you've got to run a security perimeter around us to make sure no small boats come near us. And he said, I had to open up my window and holler up to the XO [Executive Officer] on the bridge and get his attention and say, we don't have any guns. You know, what do you want us to do? Ask them to please stop? Do you see that there would be even more force protection things like that or at least schemes in place for small boats to run?

VADM Allen: There are two embedded questions there. One of them was the issue about the Strike Team not having weapons and then you immediately went to Force Protection. Which one would you like me to address?

Q: Well both, Sir. When I talked to the Strike Team guys - and I interviewed almost the whole unit - I think there were, out of 27 people, 25 of them did not want guns and two of them really did, and I don't know whether that's typical or what, and then the whole Force Protection thing.

VADM Allen: Well the mission of the Strike Team has always been environmental response.

Q: The Chiefs I talked to there did not want to manage a weapon's locker. They didn't want to have one more thing added to what they were doing, which, I guess, is the impetus for these Marine Safety Strike Teams. Are they going to be weaponized?

VADM Allen: Oh certainly. Strike Teams were established to respond to environmental issues; oil spills, Hazmat [Hazardous Materials] and so forth. On 9/11 it was a General Quarters; all hands, on-deck evolution. We deployed anybody that could provide personnel, Command and Control capability, and on-water presence got told to muster and show up. We sent the Strike Team. We deployed two Port Security Units to Boston and New York to help us control the closures of the harbor and to provide security for ships that were moving around to do boardings. In doing that we took some people that had particular capability but not everything we needed, then we had to kluge it all together and there were some significant issues. The Strike Team never, ever, ever operates in a law enforcement environment unless it's an environmental crime, like somebody intentionally spilled or something. Port Security Units always operate in a defense environment where the Rules of Engagement for hostile action apply. They are not trained in Use of Force Doctrine and Law Enforcement, which says that you use the minimum force necessary to compel compliance. They're used to working in an environment where once you declare hostile intent you take them out before they take you out.

Q: Right.

VADM Allen: So the PSUs were deployed to New York and Boston. We had some significant tactical doctrinal and training issues to deal with them. So we brought everybody to the dance because we needed everybody. It was all hands on deck. And then we had to sort out how you package these forces and give them the training they needed. And because of that we are now informed about what we need as far as establishing a permanent capability to deal with Port Security issues. A couple of things are; that for the most part, unless you're a very specialized unit, we're probably going to have to revert to the Marine mentality that every Marine's a riflemen and pretty soon a boarding is a boarding is a boarding. It's not a law enforcement boarding. It's not a recreational boating boarding. It's not a Marine Safety boarding. A Coast Guard boarding is a Coast Guard boarding.

Q: And you see us moving in that direction?

VADM Allen: Yes.

Q: Do you see every small boat station having a weapon's locker now?

VADM Allen: They do.

Q: And the Captains of the Port?

VADM Allen: Well the issue is, unless you unify the command between the "O" & "M" folks out there, how are you going to do a Command and Control and how are you going to recognize boardings? Because right now we've got some strange things going on where we'll go out and we'll do a security sweep of the vessel within our boarding team that have unarmed Marine Inspectors come onboard and check their certificates and their staffing and all that stuff. We've got to get over that. We've got to get past that.

Q: So in other words these Marine Inspection folks are completely vulnerable if somebody is hostile on those ships?

VADM Allen: Well see, this gets back to everybody still kind of doing it in different ways.

Q: Right.

VADM Allen: The notation is that you do a security sweep with the armed boarding team; the guys that know about law enforcement, and you basically secure the vessel or the perimeter, if you will, and the inspectors come on and do their job.

Q: This idea of Port Security Protection, is this the main thing, or is this just one of many things that has come out of 9/11 for you?

VADM Allen: I think following 9/11 we're going to have to figure out a way to raise the security levels in ports in response to known threats or in response to something that's happened so that we can manage the consequences to a greater degree than we have before. There's a Senate Bill; 1214, passed on the 20th of December that's going to mandate a role for the Captain of the Ports very similar to what we have for oil spills; the Federal On-scene Coordinator, except this is going to create a Federal Maritime Security Coordinator. Ultimately we're going to have to align this with the Office of Homeland Security's five alert levels that were just announced this week. So we go to Alert Level 2, 3, or 4. What does that mean in Hampton Roads? What does that mean the Coast Guard does? What is the responsibility of the private sector? What responsibility, if any, does the Navy have? And then as we slowly raise this up, what does this mean to economic flows in the port? For instance, we generally have been using this as a standard information piece for everybody. We close New York Harbor on Tuesday morning. We didn't reopen it until Thursday afternoon. At that point we hadn't allowed anybody to move other than moving people and supplies on and off lower Manhattan. At that point there were ten days heating fuel left in Albany because we were restricting tug and barge traffic up the Hudson River. There were about 48 hours, as I understand it, of refined petroleum products that were left in the Portland/Maine area because those were all trans-shipped out of the New Jersey refineries. So the question is as you put a framework in place to raise the security in the ports, how do you manage the impacts on the port and how do you make those tradeoffs? And there's a leadership role for the Coast Guard there where nobody else is capable of assuming it. We're going to have to do it. What needs to be done, with the national policy framework in mind so all the ports are being treated the same, and then the Captain of the Ports are going to have to have the authority to say, all right, we're setting Condition Three and this means that and that means you don't you go to this part of the port. If you do you're subject to a fine, forfeiture, seizures, and maybe at Security Level Four there is no recreational boating on the water. You know, those types of things are probably going to have to happen in the ports.

Q: You talk about fuel levels left in New York and so forth. As a senior commander in one of the five armed forces, did it surprise you when you thought about it that all these results could be done by 19 guys without guns?

VADM Allen: No, it doesn't surprise me.

Q: Why is that?

VADM Allen: It's an unannounced attack. There's no warning. The intelligence community is not capable of providing advance information on this. The MO [modus operandi] of these guys is they're probably not going to be use the same thing twice, so they're going to show up in some other mode of transportation. And that's the reason, even though there is no credible maritime threat, you just don't know.

Q: How do you plan for somebody who's a vapor?

VADM Allen: You focus on what you know and you try and find out what you don't know. If you go look at what's in the budget and what we're trying to do policy wise, we're going to be creating intelligence capabilities at the port level for the Captain of the Ports. We've got Navy HumInt [Human Intelligence] agents working inside our ports right now. There are going to be port level intelligence capabilities. We're going to be establishing a Tactical Maritime Intelligence Center at the area to fuse all of that. But the bottom line is the only way you get inside these threats and find out they're happening is through human intelligence.

Q: Are you satisfied that we're close to knowing what we don't know?

VADM Allen: No.

Q: What do you think it's going to take to get there, to reach a level of, if not satisfaction, at least awareness?

VADM Allen: I don't know enough to be able to answer that question right now. I just know I don't know what I don't know.

Q: It seemed for the first two or three months after 9/11 that everybody was waiting for the other shoe to drop, and a lot of people thought that it was going to be ship somewhere.

VADM Allen: That's because they were focusing on that being the most vulnerable, and that's true. The Commandant had said our marine transportation system is valuable and vulnerable; the two V's. And it is the most vulnerable because it is the most accessible.

Q: We threw everything, as you say, it was all hands on-deck on September 11th. If the other shoe had dropped, say three weeks later, what would we have done?

VADM Allen: Same thing. We'd flow everything there.

Q: So you were confident that we weren't going to be overwhelmed in our ability to respond at some point, but were you concerned that if another shoe or two or three dropped . . .?

VADM Allen: Well the way our country traditionally has acted, this is beyond the realm of the Coast Guard. We're only overwhelmed momentarily and we will flow whatever we've got to flow to do it. You know it was only 19 guys but, you know, we're spending a billion dollars a month right now as a result of that. So when we decide we're going to do something we'll do it. I have a hard time saying we, and the Coast Guard will be overwhelmed, because that's not the way we work. If we were getting overwhelmed there it would be gray hulls helping is. If we were getting overwhelmed you'd see the National Guard, which we saw down at the cruise ship terminals in Miami, helping with shore side security.

Q: What was your first contact with the gray hulls after this? Was it the first couple days or when?

VADM Allen: It was pretty damn well immediate because a couple of things happened around here, and I don't know how much of this has been declassified. Let me talk in generalities.

Q: Yes Sir.

VADM Allen: Everybody - based on their current mission set and their capabilities - tried to do what they could following 9/11, okay. There were places where we had statutory authority and responsibilities to do something immediately and we did that; New York, Boston, closing ports, doing things that we needed to do. There were people that had capabilities that potentially could help in a situation like that and everybody tried to do something. The Navy immediately moved a whole bunch of assets and some of those assets were turned around within 48 or 72 hours and sent back to port because they either were not the right fit or the window had passed where they could be effective. And in some cases they kind of started throwing stuff at the problem and were kind of told, no, we don't need that. Specifically New York City has so much inherent capability to manage emergency responses, they did not need Joint Task Force Civil Support from the Joint Forces Command, and when they went up there with an advance team they basically said, no, we've got a handle on it, so they came back. So when I heard some of the movements that were taking place with the Navy I became concerned because there are a number of units that they just dispatched to New York figuring that they would be needed up there that Admiral Bennis clearly, clearly was not going to be able to handle. It would be more of a burden having the Navy folks in there from a Force Protection standpoint than what they could accomplish inside the harbor. And if you had been taping those teleconferences on a daily basis you would have heard a whole lot of concern about, the Navy's enroute. What are they coming for? What are we going to do with them when they get here? On the Navy side, to their defense, they took the most capable platforms they had and they sent them up there because they didn't know if it was a national emergency or not. So we were watching very closely what the Navy was doing.

Q: I want to ask you two last questions here Sir. Did you visit Ground Zero and what was your reaction when you went there?

VADM Allen: Well, like all good operational commanders you want to be on-scene, but I had to remember that I wasn't the operational commander in New York. I was two echelons above that. Admiral Bennis worked for Admiral Nacarra and Admiral Nacarra works for me, and my main role in this whole thing is resource, support, and in-policy adjudication between Districts and things like that. My initial impression, I think, was to go up 48 hours later. I think it was like Wednesday or Thursday I was starting to itch to go there and, you know, make sure I understood what was going on from a personal standpoint. Sometimes Admirals don't help when they show up early. We talked about that and I talked to Admiral Nacarra and Admiral Bennis and they felt that waiting a few days was best. As it turned out I went up the following Monday, which ended up being five-and-a-half, six days later. And that ended up being even problematic in and of itself because they had locked down Reagan Airport. The Commandant's plane was there and nothing was moving, and basically as a result of my need to get to New York and use the plane we were able to get the plane out. And that basically kind of allowed us some more freedom of movement because then the Commandant could use it and everything else.

We flew up into Newark Airport and basically had a police escort over to Activities New York. I met with the folks there. I went around the harbor and I tried to at least stop for a few minutes on every boat that was in the harbor and talk to the crews. The *Katherine Walker* [WLM-552], which would have been tied up at Bayonne, went over and tied up two blocks from the World Trade Center, and those guys were there for a couple of weeks. I went onboard and I talked with them and then a couple of their petty officers that had actually been taking water and stuff up to people working at Ground Zero in the first 48 hours, we walked up together and I went into Ground Zero.

Q: What do you say to your petty officers when you meet them in those kinds of situations?

VADM Allen: Well you congratulate them on the job they're doing. You thank them for everything they're doing, the work, in spite of the adversity.

Q: Did they ever say more to you than thanks Admiral? I mean do they ever take you aside or do you ask them to come aside with you and just, you know, give you the, tell me what's really going on?

VADM Allen: Well when I went up to Ground Zero the petty officer that had done most of the work with the Fire Department, he walked up with me and everybody else was kind of . . . I had a security detail too. He kind of walked up with me and he was just passing on, just some anecdotes about what was going on. The fact that somebody from Northern New Jersey, one of the boats coming across right after 9/11 had sent over a bunch of these ATVs; those all terrain vehicles, the four wheelers, because he thought they would need them there. They took them. There was so much debris and glass that fell from the buildings that they had flat tires within one block and so they were useless. And he was talking about people sending things and some of it worked and helped and some didn't. Cosco sending pallets of water and granola bars was helpful, and so those were the conversations. I mean they were very pragmatic. They weren't really emotional.

Q: Sure. Let me ask you, speaking about the gray hull issue. It seems as if the Coast Guard can put a cutter at the Statue of Liberty for example, and it's reassuring, or say more reassuring than a Navy frigate would have been. Is that your view?

VADM Allen: Oh I think anything anchored there that had a gun on it would have been reassuring.

Q: Do you think?

VADM Allen: Yeah. I think because we did it - I think over a period of time - I think the Public Affairs people would also say this, over a period of time the image of a racing stripe out there in and around the harbor had a reassuring affect for the public at large.

Q: But does that reassurance come from the image we had before this, you know, this sort of polyglot civilian multi-mission? In other words, yes, we have guns but we're also the lifesavers.

VADM Allen: Well yeah, I think anybody there in a position of responsibility with the ability to use force and protect them would have been appreciated. I think the local value of our racing stripe went up dramatically after 9/11.

CDR McPherson: I think what you're getting at though is after a short period of time a Naval ship out in the harbor does that end up being more - and maybe you can't even speak to this really - is that more of a reminder of the threat and being a target?

Q: Or is it just making the public think that we're in a state of war.

CDR McPherson: Yeah.

VADM Allen: Well I think the farther you got away from 9/11 the more the racing stripe becomes a more utility from a national policy standpoint than the gray hull because you start having the discussions about civil liberties and the implications of all that. In fact a lot of the internal deliberations inside the Army, Marine Corps, Navy and everybody else, about, well, what is our role in Homeland Security given *Posse Comitatus* and everything else.

Q: Does that enhance us in your estimation, with DoD I mean?

VADM Allen: Sure.

Q: Does it make us more valuable to them?

VADM Allen: This is a two-front war. I'll use the metaphor. I'm not sure it's correct but I'll use the metaphor. It's a land war and an air war in Afghanistan right now. In this country terrorism is not an act of war. It is considered a criminal act. Therefore taking preventative action and having strategies to raise security levels are inherently law enforcement related, and there's nothing the military does or wants to do, therefore, they're more than happy. And the nomenclature that's used in the Joint Forces Command, which has had the maritime responsibility since 9/11, is that we are the lead federal agency for Maritime Homeland Security. We're not the Task Force Commander or Component Commander. They don't attach a DoD command name to it but they acknowledge that the mission out there is for Homeland Security which is done through a lead federal agency and that agency is the Coast Guard.

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

VADM Allen: Running out of storage there?

Q: Ah, no Sir. We can continue this. I'd like to go back and digest this, and I've got 36 something more admirals to talk to.

VADM Allen: They won't all agree with me and there's some that I told throttle back on the resources and stop doing what you're doing, that didn't.

Q: Yes sir.

END OF INTERVIEW

