



*U.S. Coast Guard Oral History Program*

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

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

**Interviewee: Lieutenant Sean MacKenzie, USCG**  
Commanding Officer, USCGC *Adak* (WPB-1333)

Interviewer: PAC Peter Capelotti, USCGR  
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Place: Station Sandy Hook

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**Q:** I'd like to start off by asking you how long you've been in the Coast Guard Sir.

**LT MacKenzie:** Ten years on May 20th.

**Q:** And how did you come here? Are you Academy or OCS [ Officer Candidate School ]?

**LT MacKenzie:** I graduated from the Academy in '92. I was on a buoy tender out of Governor's Island, New York. I was XO [ Executive Officer ] on a 110 out in California and then I went to grad school, a payback tour at Headquarters . . .

**Q:** Where did you go to graduate school?

**LT MacKenzie:** William and Mary.

**Q:** Oh Yes, for?

**LT MacKenzie:** It was for an MBA; Master in Business Administration.

**Q:** Okay. See, that's one of the other things that we're going to start now, is sending half dozen officers to get their Masters in history.

**LT MacKenzie:** Oh, history, that'll be great.

**Q:** And their payback will be either teaching history at the Academy or working with the Historian at Headquarters, or with one of these historians at the District.

**LT MacKenzie:** Oh that's great. So after William and Mary I went to Headquarters CFS; Chief of Staff's Financial Systems Office as a Cost Accounting and Financial Managing job and then came to be the CO [Commanding Officer] of [USCGC] *Adak* [WPB-1333] in July.

**Q:** July of 2001?

**LT MacKenzie:** That's right.

**Q:** So you were here for about a month or so before the big dance? What was life like for the *Adak* when you came aboard in that month or so before 9/11?

**LT MacKenzie:** It was nice. The weather in New England in the summertime is just beautiful. We took off. We did a couple of fisheries patrols off the coast of Cape Code and it was just flat, calm weather, you know, 80 degrees. I mean it was like . . . I mean I couldn't really believe I get paid to do it. It was really nice. We pulled into a couple of places in New England. So, Yes, we enjoyed it.

**Q:** Were you here that morning of 9/11?

**LT MacKenzie:** Yes, we actually were in port. We were getting our steering system fixed.

**Q:** What was wrong with the steering system?

**LT MacKenzie:** The primary means of steering was broken in auto pilot so we still had the ability to do a couple bypasses where we steered on one pump or what not. So they fixed it so that you could steer manually but you couldn't steer in automatic mode. But they had it all torn apart at the time when the first jet crashed into the World Trade Center tower. And interestingly enough from the top of the open bridge you could see the smoke from the World Trade Center tower when that first plane hit.

**Q:** So you were watching that?

**LT MacKenzie:** Yes.

**Q:** Can you recall something of the time lapse between the event and when you were called to get ready? I mean was it more or less immediate?

**LT MacKenzie:** Well right when . . .

**Q:** Well actually let me back up. Where do you get your tasking from when you're out there? Is it from Activities New York or is it from Ops [Operations] who task you to do things?

**LT MacKenzie:** Well generally if it is a District One fisheries patrol it'll be Boston; First District. But now that we have the Homeland Security mission what happens is we get tasked from Activities New York. So whenever we're doing Homeland Security stuff we're under Activities New York and when we're doing D1 Fisheries we're under Boston. So generally speaking it was Boston at the time because we didn't do Homeland Security stuff really. But Activities called us up and told us to make preps to get underway.

When the first jet ran into the Tower the guys on the boat saw the plume of smoke and went down and turned on CNN and saw that a jet had crashed into the World Trade Center tower. So right when that happened we started making preps to get underway and the EM1 [Electrician's Mate, First Class]

aboard kind of jerry-rigged the steering system so that - you know it was completely apart - but he fixed it so that we had one mode of steering; by hand.

**Q:** So you have like a “Scottie” onboard and you can say, I’ve got to get underway in ten minutes and . . .

**LT MacKenzie:** Yes, he made it happen.

**Q:** What’s his name?

**LT MacKenzie:** Vasquez; EM1 Vasquez.

**Q:** Oh Yes, I met him coming onboard. He’s a BM1 [Boatswain's Mate, First Class].

**LT MacKenzie:** EM1; Electrician’s Mate.

**Q:** Did you go up to the open bridge or did you go down to the TV? Where did you get your first view of this?

**LT MacKenzie:** When I first heard it I went up to the open bridge and I saw the plume of smoke, so I knew that something big had happened. So right after that pretty much the whole crew was down on the mess deck watching CNN. I watched it for about five minutes or so and then everybody realized we were going to be getting underway, so everybody started making preps for it. But interestingly enough, after the September 11th stuff, the phone lines went really wacky and it was difficult for anybody to call out or call into the Staten Island area. So we didn’t hear from Activities New York telling us to get underway for probably about an hour after the initial hit.

**Q:** Did that include your STU unit?

**LT MacKenzie:** Our secure phone? Yes, because even the secure phone runs off of a landline.

**Q:** So your communications were down? When did you reestablish communications? Did you get underway before you reestablished communications?

**LT MacKenzie:** Yes. What wound up happening is, by the time they actually got through and told us to get underway we were essentially taking the lines in. When they directed us to get underway we were underway like a minute or two later because we had started the preps right when the first . . .

**Q:** Can you keep the TV on when you’re underway or is that just something when you’re tied up to the dock?

**LT MacKenzie:** Well what happens is once you leave the pier the satellite TV doesn’t work, but the antenna works if you’re close enough to land.

**Q:** Ah, okay.

**LT MacKenzie:** And so we were just going in the harbor, so we got CNN in and out. But we could keep it on and still make out what was happening.

**Q:** Were you getting any kind of radio communications as you were coming across the harbor?

**LT MacKenzie:** Yes.

**Q:** Where were you heading? Where were you tasked to go?

**LT MacKenzie:** What we essentially did was back out of here. This is the entrance to the Lower Bay. That's Sandy Hook Channel right behind that Day Board. And then straight up from there is the Verazanno Bridge. So it only takes about 25 minutes going full speed to get up to the Verazanno Bridge and then you're up in the upper bay of Manhattan. And so from there it was only like another ten minutes or so to be right . . . we went right, essentially to the southern tip of Manhattan, right off the Battery.

**Q:** Did you drop anchor there or what were you doing when you got there?

**LT MacKenzie:** No. What we did was we had our QM1 [Quartermaster, First Class]; who's Matt James . . . essentially we took a chart of the harbor, put a piece of Plexiglas over it and then wrote in all the stations. Station New York and Station Sandy Hook launched all their small boats and then we plotted out where everybody's position was on the piece of Plexiglas.

Essentially we stayed off, kind of in between Governor's Island and the southern tip of Manhattan and acted as a Command and Control platform. It was interesting because they were trying to evacuate something like almost a million people off of the southern tip of Manhattan. So there were legitimate rescue and assistance boats coming in. All the commercial tugs pitched in. The commercial ferries pitched in. But then there was just a ton of recreational boats that wanted to just go take a look to see what was happening. And there were even boats with media on it, and at the time it was closed to everybody, including media.

**Q:** When you got there was . . . well before you get to that let me ask you just what you saw as you were coming up even with Governor's Island and then right up to the Battery area. Where were you? Were you on the open bridge then or were you on your regular bridge, or where were you?

**LT MacKenzie:** Inside the pilothouse is usually where I am, in the captain's chair. The smoke was billowing out. We were right off the Battery and . . . you know there are two towers for it, but then there was this brown building that was next to the World Trade Center towers, and so the second tower had fallen. But when we got up there you could look through the binoculars - and I wish I knew the name of the brown building - but there was another building that was just completely mangled. It had like broken windows. Big chunks of it were out.

**Q:** That must be the Financial Plaza.

**Unknown Commander:** It might be Seven World Trade Center.

**LT MacKenzie:** But we went up and we were looking at it through the binoculars on the open bridge; myself and a couple of crewmembers. I think the BM2 [Boatswain's Mate, Second Class] was up there and maybe the QM1 as well. So we were looking at it with binoculars and I go, oh my goodness, that building is trashed. I walked back down and sat in the captain's chair on the bridge, and then all of a sudden I heard the guys say, oh my God, it just fell down! I turned and looked and the whole building had completely fallen down and a big plume of smoke popped up. And that was just . . . like they literally saw it fall down, and I had just been looking at it, just literally a second before. And so it was pretty crazy.

As the hours unfolded after that you could look through the binoculars - and I had this really eerie feeling once, because as the sun was setting you could see the long towers of the fire trucks with hoses on them and they were hosing down the surrounding buildings - and I just kept thinking to myself, man those guys are crazy, because I just had saw that building fall down because it had a lack of structural integrity and here these guys are standing right underneath the buildings that are right next to them.

**Q:** Was there any sense among the crew . . . did you talk at all that day about what was going on? I mean did you have sense that this was a terrorist event immediately? I know for a lot of us that were watching it on TV, that word wasn't even mentioned for a few hours.

**LT MacKenzie:** Yes, I think the big thing I remember was CNN was on the phone with, I think it was the Director of the FAA [ Federal Aviation Administration ] or former director of the FAA, or something, and they were basically asking him could this be like a navigation error, you know, some error in instrumentation, and he basically said there is absolutely no chance that that was the case. So we were all pretty sure that it was a terrorist act.

**Q:** It's amazing how we've undergone that physiological change since then that something that drastic could happen and people would still have any doubt in their mind that it was a terrorist act. And now of course a pipe bomb blows up a mailbox in Nebraska and it's a local terrorist network.

Were you tasked by Activities New York to act as a Command and Control Center until the [USCGC] *Tahoma* [WMEC-908] arrived or did they tell you that specifically, or did they just say stay on station?

**LT MacKenzie:** No, it was a formal tasking. Once we got up there, on-scene, we were the first law enforcement cutter there and so we got designated as the On-scene Commander for all of New York Harbor for the first 12 hours of the Rescue and Assistance Detail. So it was a formal designation. Then once *Tahoma* got on-scene, about two in the morning or so, then it was a formal transfer; a formal relief of On-scene Commander.

The first few hours of it was fairly chaotic because there was this mass evacuation of people. The small boats and ourselves were conducting the security zones. The New York Police Department launched a bunch of boats as people; like the Park Service and the Naval Militia, and they all reported to our unit. So eventually we wound up plotting them all out and kind of spacing them around the different areas on the East River, Hudson River, East side and West side of Governor's Island, and the Buttermilk Channel, to basically keep everybody out except for the Rescue and Assistance people. Then what would happen was we'd get requests on a fairly routine basis, fairly regular basis rather, for transportation of firefighters and policemen and medical supplies from point "A" to point "B". So what we would do is look at where everybody was, look at where they wanted to be picked up, where they wanted to be dropped off and task a unit to go do that, and then task another unit to fill in wherever there security zone hole was.

**Q:** There's a sense from some of the reports in lower Manhattan that you have this crush of people coming down toward the docks. Was that what you were seeing?

**LT MacKenzie:** Oh Yes, it was interesting. The commercial tugs could go right up along the wall of the Battery and you could see people, just tons of people, climbing onboard, and the tugs were totally loaded down. The ferries were totally loaded down, and you'd see them taking off totally full of people, coming back empty, loading up, taking right back off again.

**Q:** And where were you in relation to this?

**LT MacKenzie:** Right in between Governor's Island and the southern tip of the Battery, so I mean we were right there.

**Q:** Were you engulfed in this cloud of junk as these buildings came down or had that kind of blown off by the time you got there?

**LT MacKenzie:** Well it's interesting that you say that. It had to do with the direction of the wind, and when we were there the wind was blowing toward the southeast and so we were kind of southwest of the Battery, so the debris was blowing toward the southeast. So we weren't engulfed in debris while we

were On-scene Commander. When we got relieved by *Tahoma* we went down underneath the Verazanno Bridge by Grave's End Bay and we were just covered in ash and soot and debris, and this is all the way south of the Verazanno Bridge. It was so stifling that your eyes would water and all this stuff would get in your throat. I mean it was completely nasty. I mean it was a terrible, terrible ash and soot. So we wound up leaving that - this is after we got relieved as On-scene Commander - we wound up leaving that and going over to Port Stapleton just to get a little farther southwest and so we weren't in the cloud. But that cloud was intense and obviously it was far reaching, because when we had our experience with it we were all the way south of the VZ Bridge.

**Q:** What kind of weapons suite do you have onboard?

**LT MacKenzie:** We have 25 millimeter machine guns; our big guns. We have two 50 caliber machine guns which can be mounted on the bridge wing and on the fantail. We have eight 9 millimeter Berrettas, six M-16 rifles, a shotgun and a line-throwing gun.

**Q:** Was there a sense that you needed to break all of this out that day or did you mount the machine guns when you were in the harbor?

**LT MacKenzie:** Well interestingly enough, while we were On-scene Commander we never mounted any of our weapons. Of course the 25 is always mounted so it's just a matter of uncovering it. The 50's weren't mounted. The pace of keeping track of everything in a Command and Control platform was overwhelming, and so I think the last thing anybody thought about until after we were relieved was another terrorist attack. It could be coming. We need to put the 50s on and get ready. It was more or less just trying to keep our head above water and try to keep pace with everything. But the following day as things settled out and it became like a Homeland Security thing, the 50s were mounted with ammo in them.

**Q:** What were the conversations going back and forth? Did you . . . before I get to that, what kind of relationships do you have with the other . . . you obviously must have a . . . you know the folks on the [USCGC] *Bainbridge Island* [WPB-1343]. How aware are you of, say the cutters at MOT-B and so forth, so when you're On-scene Coordinator in the middle of the harbor that you're actually, you know, you can talk to these folks more or less as colleagues? Do you know all of these folks fairly well? How does that go?

**LT MacKenzie:** The size boats that are around here; the 140, the 175, the 110s, are lieutenant commands, and so my classmate Steve Wittrock is CO of the [USCGC] *Katherine Walker* [WLM-552] and their boat actually tied up on the southern tip of the Battery.

**Q:** And he's from the same class as you?

**LT MacKenzie:** Yes, the same class at the Academy; the class of '92. The COs of the two 140s are Lieutenants as well, and the CO of the *B.I.*'s a Lieutenant, so we're all in the same rank category.

I had just reported aboard like a month and half before so I didn't know the COs of the two 140s. But I think - you might already know this - the CO of the *B.I.* was onboard *Adak* doing a familiarization tour for his change of command. So he was onboard with us just getting re-familiarized with the 110, learning the ropes; the operations. So we actually had myself and the CO of the *B.I.* onboard, so I knew him pretty well, and then of course Steve Wittrock I knew really well from the Academy.

**Q:** Uh huh. Did that help in this situation to have those kinds of relationships?

**LT MacKenzie:** Oh Yes, Yes. And I think we've got a good shake here because all of those COs are really great guys. The 110s from Wood's Hole - you probably already know - came down. The [USCGC] *Monomoy* [WPB-1326]. . . the [USCGC] *Sanibel* [WPB-1312] had some maintenance

problems initially but eventually even they got down. The CO of the *Monomoy* is a classmate of mine; as well the CO of the *Sanibel* is one class below me. So it's a small enough service, and the classes at the Academy are small enough, that generally if there's a lieutenant in command of the boat, you probably . . .

**Q:** If you don't know him you know somebody that knows him.

**LT MacKenzie:** Yes, you've probably crossed paths.

**Q:** After you were relieved as On-scene Commander what were your responsibilities for the next few days or weeks?

**LT MacKenzie:** Well what they wound up doing was they got *Monomoy* down, which was a big help. And so the *Bainbridge Island* was on a two-month patrol down in D7 but they were transiting back. So they wound up coming back from a two-month patrol, I think September 12th. And so rather typically what happens after a two-month patrol, you come in port for three or four weeks and everybody just kind of decompresses. But they went straight back out, and they had a 110 stationed at the Verazanno Bridge, one at the UN [United Nations] Building, one at the Indian Point Nuclear Power Plant and then one at the entrance to the East River, so all those missions were a little bit different. But what they did, for a couple of weeks anyway was, you would be at your assigned responsibility for a couple of days, and then, like if you were at the Indian Point Nuclear Power Plant on the Hudson River, then you would go to the UN. The UN would go to the Frogsneck Bridge on the East River. The Frogsneck Bridge one would go down to the Verazanno Bridge. The Verazanno Bridge would go up to the Indian Point Nuclear Power Plant. So they rotated people through all the different things that we were supposed to be protecting and enforcing and they did that for a couple week period.

The duties were different depending on where you were. Up at the Indian Point Nuclear Power Plant it's fairly exhausting duty because the order then was to board everybody; all commercial boats coming up or down the river that pass by the Indian Point Nuclear Power Plant and keep all rec [recreation] boats outside of the security zone. There was a little line that was drawn where the rec boats had to stay outside of, and so the rotations when we were up there . . . we only wound up being up there for a 48-hour period but we did 24 boardings in a 48-hour period with a small crew maintaining an underway watch and having a full time boarding team out was an exhausting two days. And so I think that's what helped with rotating the 110s around. Before we wound up having to go back up for another stint of that, they wound up doing a joint responsibility with the state and local law enforcement agencies and then I think they sent the 140s up there as well.

**Q:** This is usually the point in the interview, when I'm interviewing admirals, where I spring this on them and see what their response is. If every Marine is a rifleman, what's every Coast Guardsman?

**LT MacKenzie:** Every Coast Guardsman is a sailor. They wear a couple of hats because you have to know about SAR [search and rescue] and you have know about LE [law enforcement], but you have to do it from a ship. So I guess you are a sailor first and then you have your whole LE knowledge; your weapons qualifications, your SAR patterns memorized, your pump team trained and your towing drill down pat.

**Q:** Where would you - we've had six months or so of time since 9/11 - where would fit this in, in your own experience, in the Coast Guard, I mean now that you've had a little bit of a chance to look back on it? Do you see this as . . . was Homeland Security anywhere on your radar screen before this, and where do you fit it into your life and your career now?

**LT MacKenzie:** It wasn't really a part of the 110s daily operation before September 11th. *Adak* still has a reputation for a D1 fisheries law enforcement boat and had that high level of expertise going into September 11th. The Homeland Security stuff now is a big part I think. We didn't leave the harbor until

the first of the year; until January. I mean we were essentially doing Homeland Security from September 11th straight through until the beginning of January.

**Q:** Uh huh.

**LT MacKenzie:** Since January we've started doing our fisheries patrols, but on a consistent and fairly regular basis they'll have a Homeland Security POSTOP, which basically means you drop whatever you're doing with fisheries - no notice - and steam and do Homeland Security. And there's been quite a few of them since then, since January, when we started doing this. So now, you know, essentially it wasn't on the radar scope at all before September 11th and now it's a part of a daily patrol. If you have two-week deployment; a two-week fisheries deployment, chances are you're going to get a POSTOP at some point in time during it where you're going to be doing Homeland Security.

**Q:** I had a couple more questions for you. Commander, did you have anything you'd like to ask from where you were sitting?

**Unknown Commander:** Actually I do. I'm curious. On September 11th, after you were On-scene Commander, what kind of taskings were you getting?

**LT MacKenzie:** Oh, after we had been relieved?

**Unknown Commander:** No, while you were On-scene Commander.

**LT MacKenzie:** Oh, while we were on-scene.

**Unknown Commander:** Like you mentioned, transportation for supplies and equipment and stuff like that.

**LT MacKenzie:** Yes, it was interesting because basically we designated three channels on the radio; one for us to talk to other Coast Guard units, one for us to talk to other law enforcement agencies; NYPD [New York Police Department], National Park Service and the Naval Militia, and then one channel just to talk to Activities. After the initial call from Activities New York that designated us On-scene Commander, the other requests that we got for humanitarian assistance came from a few of the other agencies or from the Coast Guard units. And so Activities New York, we really didn't talk to them that much after the initial designation. It was pretty much, you know, a New York Police Department boat would call us up and say, hey, we've got this request here. What can we do about this?

**Unknown Commander:** So what were you transporting?

**LT MacKenzie:** The three types of calls we got were policemen, firemen and medical supplies. So there was a huge medical response contingent standing by, I believe in Bayonne; a couple hundred doctors and tons of medical supplies. But really there weren't that many bodies that needed, you know, people were dead.

**Q:** Yes. They thought they were going to have a big medivac operation and there wasn't anybody to medivac.

**LT MacKenzie:** It never materialized. And so eventually what they wound up doing was transferring a bunch of their supplies and stuff onto the Battery for the ambulances that were working there. But the big medivac that people were expecting really didn't happen. I think that was just because the body count was so high.

**Unknown Commander:** Did the Coast Guard boats; the 41s and so forth themselves, evacuate anybody?



**LT MacKenzie:** I don't remember that, no, and I would be surprised if anybody had said they did just because there was enough activity there for just running around enforcing security zones and doing the humanitarian logistics. That, coupled with the fact that the commercial tugs and the ferries can haul a ton of people, and they were doing a good job of it.

**Q:** That's part of the mythic heretic that's taken root from 9/11 is that the Coast Guard evacuated a million people from Manhattan and . . .

**Unknown Commander:** Well we did sort of.

**LT MacKenzie:** We did?

**Unknown Commander:** We certainly supervised and coordinated, but it wasn't our ships and boats that did it.

**Q:** I think we coordinated a million people evacuating - I think that's right - without a lot of people getting killed.

**LT MacKenzie:** Yes.

**Q:** But physically I don't even think we have enough vessels in the whole Coast Guard to do that, even if they all were in the New York Harbor that day - do we - to evacuate a million people in 12 hours?

**Unknown Commander:** Everyone we could have evacuated would have been dropped. Were Coast Guard boats escorting the Staten Island Ferry? I've heard that story.

**LT MacKenzie:** Oh, escorting the Staten Island Ferry, no.

**Q:** You're talking specifically about armed escorts or just . . . ?

**Unknown Commander:** I read in message traffic that it happened. I've never been able to find anybody who personally remembers it.

**Q:** This would have been a 41?

**Unknown Commander:** Apparently.

**LT MacKenzie:** No, I don't remember that happening.

**Q:** Since then have weapons in your security patrols become more a part of daily life? Do you see them more now than you did before 9/11? How has it changed culturally for the *Adak* since 9/11?

**LT MacKenzie:** We've always had our requirement to do semi-annual gun shoots with the .50 cal and the 25. When we do Homeland Security stuff we have things like LPG [Liquefied Petroleum Gas] escorts and cruise ship escorts now, and so to make sure that we're prepared for that we're doing our 50 cal gun shoots on a regular basis. Our 25 - we just got back from and we had a misfire - and so it's broken. But the 50s have always worked well. We've done our gun shoots on a regular basis.

**Q:** Is that a common feature of the 25?

**LT MacKenzie:** Yes, the 25 is just a mess. I mean it's a tough weapon to have operate at a 100-percent all the time. But the only thing I'll say as far as Homeland Security goes is when we've been directed to do vessel escorts; high interest vessel escorts, they've always asked us to have the .50s

mounted and ready. The 25 is kind of a big gun to shoot in the harbor and the .50s are more appropriate and more aptly suited to use on high interest vessel escorts.

**Q:** A nice thing to have for show at the bow but not very effective in a harbor.

**LT MacKenzie:** Yes, we usually uncover the 25. But we have the two .50s manned and ready with ammo in them with people standing by when we do our vessel escorts.

**Q:** Was there, and is there now, a sense that you want to be much more visible in a kind of weaponized sense then before 9/11?

**LT MacKenzie:** Well all of our Homeland Security POSTOPS are with the .50s mounted in an overt patrol around the Battery, around the Hudson River and the East River, and I think what they want to say is if the public sees the Coast Guard cutters out there with their machine guns; with their 25 uncovered and with the .50s mounted on a fairly regular basis, it'll at least be in the back of their mind that, Yes, the Coast Guard is there a lot. The Coast Guard is in the harbor. And so everything we do from a Homeland Security perspective is all overt. It's all overt patrols.

**Q:** I've heard a couple things along the way in the last six months about the hull of the 110-footer. Do you want to give me a few thoughts on that?

**LT MacKenzie:** Yes, well it's interesting. The naval engineers up at Boston and MLC [Maintenance and Logistics Command] say that the D1 [First Coast Guard District] 110s should be in better condition than the Florida 110s. The D7 [Seventh Coast Guard District] 110s I should say. The 110s down in D7 have - in the course of normal operations; steaming out for SAR cases or what not, pounding through waves - sprung leaks in their hulls. Not a result of hitting anything, just a result of normal fatigue and wear and tear, and hull plate thinning to the point where the hull plate will just crack. There's 22 110s that are going to have major hull renovations done to reinforce the hull. We're not one of those. We're hull number 33 out of 49 so we're one of the later hulls. And the operating environment in D1 - this is what I'm told - is there's not as much humidity in the air. The boats don't get run as hard as they do down in D7. And so theoretically the hull plating up here should be in better condition. We did a two-week availability in Boston back in March. They took some UT shots of the forward auxiliary space, and the lowest UT shot was 19-percent deterioration in the hull. They say you should get concerned when you hit 25 percent. So they say we're fine for now. We've got some areas we're keeping our eye on. But then part of the thing they are doing in this maintenance availability is they're doing UT shots for the aft steering and the battery space. Then in October they're supposed to be doing UT shots for the engine room because we're getting our engines changed out. So they're going to take the engines out and then UT shoot the engine rooms.

**Q:** If you could make any recommendations based on what happened that day and the weeks after, what would they be in terms of from, say, better communications or different communications, or things like that? Based on your experience what would you do differently, if anything? Is there anything that you would have liked to have that you didn't have that day?

**LT MacKenzie:** Well I'm not sure the Coast Guard can do anything about this, but the radios were fairly crazy and communications were fairly tough on the radios. So the natural correlator would just be to call my classmate up on a cell phone. The cell phones were completely OOC. Everybody was trying to use them and the circuits were completely overloaded, so it was often difficult to get any type of communication going in the harbor. The ability to talk in secure communication is tough because we have the ability to broadcast on HF secure, which works in a hit or miss fashion. But none of the small boats have HF secure. They don't have an HF radio. They just have VHF. So we have crypto for VHF secure but it really doesn't work well in the harbor because it has a fairly short range to start with when you go VHF secure. Then when you put all the buildings, the interferences and electronic stuff that's filtering through the air, we have like a quarter-mile range at best.

**Q:** Was that a problem for you that day making any communications, much less secure communications with the 41-footers?

**LT MacKenzie:** Well everything was in the clear on that one day. And so the communications were next to impossible when we first got there. But then putting all the other law enforcement agencies on one channel; all the Coast Guard agencies on one channel, and then talking to Activities on a separate channel helped a bunch. Then asking everybody else who was trying to communicate on those three channels to not, to pick another channel, that helped a bunch on that first day. Then the other thing was that on the first day the communications were essentially surrounding the southern tip of Manhattan on the East River/Hudson Rive/Buttermilk Channel and the Battery, so everybody was in a fairly tight area. The following day the security zones increased all the way to the Frogsneck Bridge on the East River, all the way down to the Verrazano Bridge and then up the Hudson River quite a bit. And so once everybody got all spread out then it was a complete – oh, and then the Kill Van Kull, you know, around the backside of Staten Island. So once the security zones increased in size that following day, it was just next to impossible to try to talk to everybody. We had been relieved by *Tahoma*, and so, of course, then our focus was making sure that we were able to communicate with *Tahoma*. So it wasn't a big deal for us that we couldn't talk to everybody else that was all around, but it was a big deal for *Tahoma* because *Tahoma* couldn't talk to everybody and they were the On-scene Commander at that stage. They were in charge of it. So I think, for us, we did a good job, but we had a lot of things in our favor so it made it easier for us.

After those first 12-hours when they increased the security zones and made the *Tahoma* in charge, and then, of course, everybody and their brother showed up. And so the first 12-hours or so it was us and some small boats and the *Katherine Walker* was tied up at the Battery, so we had something that was fairly manageable. In the days following the Coast Guard was just completely . . . I mean the whole harbor was covered with Coast Guard people. I think the [USCGC] Juniper [WLB-201] came down and I think they just wanted a large show of force in the harbor. They wanted people to know that the Coast Guard was there.

**Q:** Was that the most Coast Guard vessels you saw in one place?

**LT MacKenzie:** Yes, every Coast Guard vessel from the Bay Area was in New York Harbor.

**Q:** What's the craziest thing you saw?

**LT MacKenzie:** It had to be the firemen standing underneath those buildings shooting water up on the building that was right next to the one that fell down for lack of structural integrity, and it wasn't like they did it and then they went home. I mean they were there all night long trying to put out fire and maintain the structural integrity of the surrounding buildings.

**Q:** What's the most significant thing you think the Coast Guard did in those first days and weeks?

**LT MacKenzie:** Well I think people didn't know if there were going to be more attacks coming. They didn't know if this was just a start of something larger.

**Q:** They still don't.

**LT MacKenzie:** And they still don't, right . So there was a lot of uncertainty, and I think that probably the biggest thing the Coast Guard did was kind of reassure the American public that people weren't going to come into the harbor. You know, terrorists, if they were going to do something, it wasn't going to be by the harbor. They weren't going to take control of a liquid hazardous gas vessel and ram in into the Battery. I mean it wasn't going to happen. And seeing a large police force; New York Police force and a large Coast Guard force out there, I think it reassured the public's confidence in their safety.

**Q:** Did this event lead to better coordination between you, your forces, and those local authorities like the New York Police Department?

**LT MacKenzie:** Yes. There have been a lot of meetings. More on the Activities level than on the unit levels. But for example, the Indian Point Nuclear Power Plant is completely protected now from what I understand by the state and local authorities. Having the other agencies help out has been a big plus. When we do the vessel escorts we'll escort a vessel carrying volatile fuel into Kill Van Kull, then typically it's a Coast Guard 41, but then also a New York Police Department boat stands up and actually provides the security while the ship is offloading fuel or onloading fuel, and then the 110 will escort them back out. But they've been able to augment the Coast Guard a lot and we've accepted it.

**Q:** Just to ask you a couple of final things. Compare today with 9/11, weather wise; clearer, murkier?

**LT MacKenzie:** The weather on September 11th that day? It was nice. Yes, it was like this I think, Yes.

**Q:** Better visibility than today?

**Unknown Commander:** It was about 70 degrees.

**LT MacKenzie:** Yes, it was a nice day. You know one thing I thought that I would just throw out - because I've had to do a couple TV interviews and a couple magazine interviews since the time. People don't tend to ask about it - but when we took off, one memory that I have is that all the spouses are here at Sandy Hook. Well most of the spouses live right here in Sandy Hook, and we were gone. I mean when all the terrorist attacks were happening we took in the lines and we were taking off and I can remember all the spouses being on the pier. They came down and waived us off when we left and were gone at the time, and when we would come in - we would just come in for water and fuel and pump sewage and then we would take right back off - and when we would, they would come down and waive us off, you know, say goodbye and all that kind of stuff. But I think it was tough.

**Q:** Did your friend Lieutenant Wittrock tell you about . . . are you aware of when his electronics got fried, I think, that night or the next night by a lightning hit on the *Katherine Walker*?

**LT MacKenzie:** No.

**Q:** It blew out their antenna.

Is there anything else you would like to add Commander Sir?

**Unknown Commander:** No.

**Q:** Any final thoughts Sir?

**LT MacKenzie:** No.

**Q:** Well let me ask you one final thing. What would you carry out of this time that you might make use of later in your career as you advance as an officer, I mean in relations with your men and your crew? What means the most to you?

**LT MacKenzie:** I think you've just got to live everyday like you don't have tomorrow. You know, you've got to do a good job. Go out and give 100 percent the whole time, because you never know what's going to happen in the future.

**Q:** Well you guys certainly did. Sir, I want to thank you very much for your time, especially for inviting me up on such a nice day.

**LT MacKenzie:** Alright, my pleasure.

**Q:** The pleasure's all mine Sir. Thank you.

**END OF INTERVIEW**

