



# U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

## *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: **Rear Admiral George Naccara, USCG**  
Commander, First Coast Guard District

Interviewer: PAC Peter Capelotti, USCGR

Date of Interview: 2 April 2002

Place: First Coast Guard District Conference Room, Boston, Massachusetts

---

**Q:** I see you've got Steven Spielberg set up right outside the window here. I remember reading one of Sterling Haden's books where he talks about the old buildings along the waterfront.

**RADM Naccara:** That's the Federal courthouse.

**Q:** Oh, I meant this one right under here.

**RADM Naccara:** Oh yes.

**Q:** Of course maybe that's the Federal courthouse where they send everyone.

**RADM Naccara:** Yes, this is quite a scenic waterfront actually. I've seen some real changes. This was my first duty station also in Boston.

**Q:** Oh is that right?

**RADM Naccara:** I wish I had the foresight to have bought some of that waterfront property back in the late sixties, early seventies.

**Q:** I grew up in Whitman about 25 miles south of here, and you're not the only one who's kicking themselves that didn't buy either here or on the Cape 25 years ago.

**RADM Naccara:** Yes.



# U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

**Q:** Well Sir, as I said, this is more or less an attempt in something approaching real time to sit down with a few select units and most of the senior leadership in the Coast Guard to try to reconstruct what happened that day and the policy decisions that have spun out from 9/11 since then. And whereas the Navy has sent 12 Reserve O-6s to document their participation in 9/11, the Coast Guard has sent a Reserve E-7, so . . .

**RADM Naccara:** Well that's about even.

**Q:** You and I can say that. I don't say that when I meet with the Navy though.

**RADM Naccara:** No, that's amazing; 12 O-6s. I had no idea.

**Q:** Well the Army has 24 of what they call MHDs; Military History Detachments, three-person detachments; an officer and two enlisted. They've got 24 of them and they activated 22 of them to document the Army, both here and for Enduring Freedom. So they've got something like 65 people that they've activated. So yes, my Captain . . . when I came on active duty . . .  
(INTERVIEW INTERRUPTED)

**RADM Naccara:** . . . my Public Affairs staff here and we now have an O-6. We've ended up with an O-6 billet being established for that purpose.

**Q:** For GI.

**RADM Naccara:** Yes.

**Q:** Or DI I guess.

**RADM Naccara:** DG we call it.

**Q:** DG, uh huh.

**RADM Naccara:** DG, yes, and it's paid so many dividends for us, particularly in the last six or seven months. But even before that we had our OpSail Tall Ship events with five of them up here in D1. We had that fishing vessel casualty with the *Virgo* hit by the commercial vessel. We had a lot of publicity for that. Then we had the ice season of last year and we had such outreach to all of our elected representatives that it really sold well for the Coast Guard.

**Q:** Well I think that anybody who saw that 9/11 documentary, having essentially a team of historians documenting operations on site is . . . I mean without that they had nothing.

**RADM Naccara:** Yes, invaluable.



# U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

**Q:** And I think from [Chief of Coast Guard Public Affairs] Captain [Jeff] Karonis point of view this is a chance to capture what happened and then why decisions were made the way they were, because this is going to be seen as a hinge in the history of the Coast Guard for years, if not bigger than OPA 90 [Oil Pollution Act of 1990].

**RADM Naccara:** Sure, oh yes, absolutely.

**Q:** So I noticed in your career you've had a lot of "M" experience.

**RADM Naccara:** Yes.

**Q:** And it was news to me coming on active duty for the first time that there was this big dichotomy between the "M" people and the "O" people and the Captain of the Port has to call an "O" person to get a boat to go across the harbor. It's kind of hard to explain to someone outside the Coast Guard that the Coast Guard has to liaison with the Coast Guard for certain assets.

**RADM Naccara:** It's true.

**Q:** It's been a very steep four-month learning curve.

**RADM Naccara:** Other than in New York, and the case in point was the Activity command.

**Q:** And [Commander of Coast Guard Activities New York Rear] Admiral [Richard] Bennis said the same thing. He said that if this event had happened anywhere but New York it would have been a real problem just because of the state of Coast Guard communications.

**RADM Naccara:** Yes.

**Q:** He basically made the point that if they don't seize this chance to do something about "M" and "O" and sort of knock them together then they'll never get another chance like this, because they're finally talking to each other.

**RADM Naccara:** That's absolutely right, probably less effectively at Headquarters than in the field. But I have had proposals in for a year and a half now to merge Boston MSO and Group to form an activity. I want to form Activity Maine. I have another proposal on that too, to merge the two groups and the MSO in the whole state of Maine. Great, great reasons for doing that and we'll also diminish some of our footprint in some cases and that's a value for us, but it's slow in coming.

**Q:** Right. Well I think that one of the things I've been looking at that I'd like to go over with you is, I went over - and we can do this now or after we talk about 9/11 - but just the surge that went on, well the platform hours, the cutter force and the boat force, which spiked on 9/10 and then on 9/11 where all the aircraft were grounded. And the cutter surge, both just in terms of hours and



# U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

the boat surge and missions, they surged in terms of defense and civilian port security. But their overall hours, they didn't drop off a lot of missions so it really was a true surge and where they picked them up was about . . . here's the surge here. And so the cutters were more or less back to their normal hours within about three weeks but the boats were still getting whacked.

**RADM Naccara:** Back to the normal hours or normal missions?

**Q:** Normal hours. Their missions were different.

**RADM Naccara:** Normal hours, yes, okay.

**Q:** But then that was an education learning that aircraft and cutters are budgeted one way and small boats are budgeted a whole different way.

**RADM Naccara:** Uh huh. Typically I describe the surge around New York as consuming 22 years of small boat programmed hours in a little under one month.

**Q:** Yes, it's extraordinary what they did.

**RADM Naccara:** It is.

**Q:** In fact I'm going to be . . . that's all day Thursday I'm going to be talking to Captain Harrison, Commander [Michael F.] McAllister and his folks down there.

**RADM Naccara:** Good, good. Good guys who know a lot about that. We'll be paying for that for many years because of the maintenance and the support demands and how our system just can't cope with that. But we could not quantify the amount of time and wear on our people as well as we could on our boats and aircraft. So that could really have a long-term effect on people. But right now the energy and the enthusiasm seem to be continuing.

**Q:** Yes, I went into those issues in quite a bit of detail. I spent a week with the Atlantic Strike Team and they took me to Fresh Kills and Ground Zero, and those guys are tops. I don't know whether they've pulled out from Ground Zero, but if they have it's just in the last couple of weeks. They've been air monitoring there for months now.

**RADM Naccara:** I know they have, yes.

**Q:** I'd like to start just by asking you where you were that morning. Were you here in the building?

**RADM Naccara:** I was here in the building actually sitting at my desk when one of our O-6s walked in and told me that a plane had just run into the World Trade Center. I put the TV



# U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

on. We have a cable connection there, and of course we were still thinking that it was just an accident at that point.

**Q:** Uh huh.

**RADM Naccara:** And then even while we were watching that I saw what appeared to be something hit the other one and we thought it was perhaps an explosion from the first one; sending off shrapnel, and we realized it was another plane. There we were at the desk. We ended up calling all of our senior troops together right away here in our conference room.

**Q:** Oh you did?

**RADM Naccara:** Yes.

**Q:** And what did you say to them?

**RADM Naccara:** Well I said . . . we'll I had a lot of questions. I didn't have a lot of answers at that point.

I had, in the interim between the two planes, I had called down to Activities New York to see if Bennis was there and he was heading south on leave. I got him on the cell phone and I said, you really ought to turn around and come back to New York, which he was already underway and doing probably at about 90 miles an hour back up the Jersey Turnpike.

We tried to get a sense for any Coast Guard involvement at that point and it was just too preliminary. We didn't think we had anybody in the immediate vicinity but we sent some small boats from Station New York over.

I got the senior staff together here and we talked about potential actions; what could we do at this point? Then while we were sitting there I guess we found out about the Pentagon situation and then we heard that the first Trade Center Building had collapsed, and that was some of it (phonetic).

It probably affected me more than most because I'm a native New Yorker. I grew up in the New York-New Jersey area.

**Q:** Are you?

**RADM Naccara:** And then I was stationed on Governor's Island during the early seventies when the Trade Center was being completed, and I've always had an affinity for New York and spent a lot of time in the city. So this was probably more personally troubling to me than for anybody else on the staff.



## U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

**Q:** Uh huh. Somebody told me years ago when I visited New York in 1977, they showed me the Trade Center, which has just been built, and said it's very New York to do something big twice. And so you could see that this was a big point of pride. In fact one of the reasons why I was able to get out of teaching for a year is that my associate dean is from the Bronx and took this as a personal body blow when this was done to his city.

**RADM Naccara:** Yep. We talked about asset movements at that point.

**Q:** What kind of things were you looking at at that early stage? I mean I know that . . . this morning I talked to Captain Yatto who said as soon as they saw the second plane go in they were told to get their helos saddled up and get down there. Assuming that something was . . . whatever it was the crews were . . . at that point the North Tower was still up. They were assuming that they might go down there and try to pluck people off the roof before they were diverted. But from your point of view, as District Commander, what were your immediate concerns?

**RADM Naccara:** I didn't know whether there would be additional terrorist attacks at other places in the city.

**Q:** Were you aware at that point that the planes had come from Boston?

**RADM Naccara:** No, not at all. It wasn't probably until four or five hours afterwards that we found out where the planes had come from.

**Q:** Okay. So there was no sense at that early stage that you were under threat here in Boston?

**RADM Naccara:** No, no. But we didn't know what to think, and when the Pentagon was hit that's when we got a little more concerned that perhaps there will be other sites hit around the country. And among ourselves we were saying, does that mean like the Prudential Building here? What other landmarks will they try to hit? The Statue of Liberty in New York, will they go after that? And we think we've got quite a few critical infrastructure items within the First District: a number of nuclear power plants alongside waterways, a number of critical bridges and tunnels and so forth, especially in the New York area of course. But up here, similar concerns.

So there was just a lot of unease and a real sense of, I want to go to New York and help. Most of the people felt, let's chip in and do what we can just as Americans. And what it meant for the Coast Guard we didn't know. We thought about sending more people down there, certainly, and then we thought about the boats and ships and aircraft at that point. But I didn't know what they were going to do at first. Are they going to go down and protect somebody or are they going to go move people off the island? It wasn't until probably two to three hours later we started getting a sense for the calamity that was southern Manhattan at that point.



# U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

**Q:** Uh hum. In terms of the strategic parts of the 1st District, was there any thinking to setting up waterside security patrols around nuclear plants and so forth at that early stage?

**RADM Naccara:** No, not at that early stage, no. That wasn't until the next morning. Then we started to think about critical infrastructure and we said, well, we've got so many things to protect. And then my question to my staff was, how are we going to protect it? What does protect and defend mean? And my line that I've repeated over and over again right from that first day on was we're sending our folks out there with a blue light and little else and I said, I can't accept that. You know the fact that we're there is somewhat of a deterrent but in reality it's meaningless.

**Q:** Not going to hold off Al Qaeda very long.

**RADM Naccara:** No. We're pretty much unarmed and of those that have arms are probably untrained in what are the Rules of Engagement and so forth. I said there are too many questions to be answered here so what do we want to do? We debated that for quite a while. It evolved to a point where we felt that our attention will focus in New York and that's when I thought that we'll have to have many more assets from the rest of the District to come to New York to supplement the troops down there. As we saw our role as moving people and we were still assuming that there would be many injured that we would be taking, and I think Governor's Island came up within hours after the attack as a potential site for a hospital and a morgue. And so we were making plans to do that. Then when the buildings collapsed of course we started to lose communications and that was extremely frustrating. We had cell phone communications with only one or two people at the Activity. So I felt that it was necessary for us to set this Regional Incident Command and establish it down in New York, bringing some communication capabilities with us, and then to also have the decision making folks - whom I brought about three or four key staffers - with me; a lawyer, an operations and an "M" type, so that we could help move assets as necessary.

**Q:** What were your first contacts with your leadership senior to you? Did you talk to [Commander of Coast Guard Atlantic Area Vice] Admiral [Thad W.] Allen or to Headquarters that first day?

**RADM Naccara:** Yes.

**Q:** What kind of things were they asking from you and what kind of things were you asking of them?

**RADM Naccara:** I was asking nothing of them at that point. I was just passing information to them.

**Q:** Right.



# U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

**RADM Naccara:** Everybody has this unquenchable thirst for information and that was the case here. So I was getting information from Bennis and I was getting information from someone else who happened to be in the Battery Park building and passing that down to the Headquarters who then passed it on to the Department of Transportation. I was discussing those with Admiral Allen. I was not asking for any resources at that point. We were still trying to define what our roles were and what expectations there may be of the Coast Guard at that point.

**Q:** Uh hum. When did you get a handle on that definition?

**RADM Naccara:** Probably early the next day; 9/12. That's when we decided to fly down. I guess it was probably in the morning when we made the decision and we were in the air at I think around noon or so.

**Q:** You took a [HU-25] Falcon down or one of the helos?

**RADM Naccara:** We took a helo down; an H-60, and we landed on Staten Island on the base.

**Q:** Uh huh. What greeted you when you got there?

**RADM Naccara:** Admiral Bennis and a couple of his staff. We went right to their Headquarters building.

We discussed generally the amount of damage that they had seen. I think the personnel casualties at that point were coming down dramatically, you know, 25,000 to 10,000 to six or seven thousand and what roles the Coast Guard was playing at that point. There was a lot of debate at that point of whether the Navy would come into New York Harbor with an aircraft carrier and part of a battlegroup, and we didn't think that was necessary. Then there was some debate about bringing a hospital ship in and there was a push to establish some kind of a communications center; an Emergency Management Center, if you will, in New York, since their primary buildings were destroyed. We were providing communications as best as could be expected. I think it was one of the major telecommunications networks or firms provided us a number of cell phones that helped a lot because we were struggling in those first two days. A lot of the communications for New York went through the World Trade Center building.

**Q:** Did you go across to lower Manhattan that first morning?

**RADM Naccara:** I did. I went over with Admiral Bennis. We took a small boat over and we tied up at the lower West Side and we walked over and toured Ground Zero.

**Q:** Uh huh. What was your reaction when you got there?

**RADM Naccara:** It was disbelief. Words are inadequate to describe what I saw. The people that were walking around; the volunteers, everybody was dazed. I walked right into the area





# U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

where people were coming back; were cycling in and out of Ground Zero, of the hole in the ground there, and they were speechless for the most part. I didn't see too many injured people but the workers were just covered with this grit. It was as if we had a snowstorm but it was not snow. It was this grit. It was the powder from cement. And honestly it was probably three quarters of an inch deep on the cars and the sidewalk where I was walking. And you'd see pieces of paper, like this, sitting . . . every place you walked there was paper. It was amazing what endured. You know some of the things you would not have expected.

**Q:** What was destroyed and a piece of paper survived.

**RADM Naccara:** Yes, all kinds of personal notes and things everywhere in the street. We saw a number of emergency vehicles that were destroyed and parts of them just lying off. It was very shocking for me. It's probably the most devastating scene I'll ever see in my life. I hope it is, and the most I'll ever see in my life because we walked right in there as we were in uniform and no one stopped us at all, and we got a pretty close up view.

**Q:** The Commandant compared it, when he went there, to looks on people's faces to what he had seen in combat shock in Vietnam.

**RADM Naccara:** Yes. I can imagine that was the case. I've never experienced that myself. But I have to say everybody was focused on what they were doing and they wanted to be involved. Nobody wanted to come back and take a break. You could see that in their faces.

Nobody was wearing any kind of respiratory equipment. The three or four of us that were walking around had these paper breathing covers, just like a little something you'd wear when you're working on woodwork or so. They were very ineffective of course and I think after a while we all took them off. We said, well, what the heck. We'll take our chances here. But there was a tremendous stench in the air.

**Q:** Yes. I've got the list of everything that you were breathing in.

**RADM Naccara:** Do you?

**Q:** Did you talk to any of our folks down there?

**RADM Naccara:** I did. I walked onboard the buoy tender that was tied up right there. I talked to a number of the folks there and they were providing coffee and cold drinks and some food to New York firefighters and policemen that were cycling out and walking over toward the water.

**Q:** What kind of things do you say to . . . I mean when you walk into a situation like that I know it's a crisis. Everybody's sort of doing their own job. But when you're looking at your own people who have been working for whatever it is; 30, 40, 50 hours straight, you must have some self-awareness that as a two-star admiral people don't react normally when you're around. What



# U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

do you do to talk to them or to get something out of them more than, oh, everything's fine Admiral?

**RADM Naccara:** I didn't have a problem with that this time. It seemed like people were willing to talk about it. Early in the conversation I would say that I'm a native New Yorker so this means something to me and I think that would help break the ice. People were much more willing to openly show their emotions. Everybody I talked to was extremely distraught. They were so personally hurt by this, but they said . . . there was a singular mission in their mind as Americans. They want to stay here and they want to help. They don't want to take a break. They don't want to go back to the Island. They want to stay right here. And even if it's just providing drinks and some kind of comfort to the rescue workers, they wanted to stay there. They wanted to go into the mess themselves but that was not the right thing to do.

**Q:** You're also a senior officer in one of the Armed Forces. Did you have a chance, or did you think about your reaction to having a sense of the country under attack?

**RADM Naccara:** I wanted to remain as calm and reassuring as I could be. I felt that was necessary.

**Q:** Uh huh.

**RADM Naccara:** It's one of those things you learn in your education as you become a flag officer. It doesn't happen overnight and sometimes the magnitude of that expectation might surprise you. If that's not your typical makeup, and as you say, people look to an admiral at any level for certain reassurances I know.

**Q:** Especially in a crisis.

**RADM Naccara:** In a crisis especially, right. And I felt it was important that I appeared in control of myself and in control of my senses.

Like we talked about issues as far as what can the Coast Guard do? How can I bring more assets into New York to help? I've got a District full of people that want to come and help here but we have to think this through and consider our needs in our other ports as things were evolving. I had to explain to people that it's not a good thing for you to stay here for 36 hours straight. You need to take a break. You need to take a rest.

**Q:** One of the things that Admiral Allen said that is whenever he has a crisis, whenever crisis come up, he immediately sends half of his people home.

**RADM Naccara:** Yes.



# U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

**Q:** Because 24 hours later they're all going to be exhausted and you've got to have somebody to replace those people.

**RADM Naccara:** Yes, that's right. It was so difficult to send anybody home at that point. I mean not that they would have disobeyed orders but everybody wanted to help.

**Q:** They all wanted to stay, Yes. What were your worries as a District Commander? Were you worried about getting kicked in the ass somewhere that you weren't throwing all these resources at New York? That somebody might . . . or that the other shoe was going to drop, in other words, somewhere else?

**RADM Naccara:** I didn't worry about that so much. I don't know why. It wasn't that I had any great intelligence to tell us that. We were screaming for any kind of intelligence at that point as a matter of fact. It was so sketchy and . . .

**Q:** Who were you screaming for that; from Headquarters, or the Area, or the Pentagon?

**RADM Naccara:** Actually all sources because we had some good connections in New York with other Intel agencies. We looked to them to provide something for us. We had FBI folks right there with us on Staten Island and we had connections through to our Headquarters and to Area with their large intel staffs, and then we were seeking something from them that could help us in developing an operational plan, some kind of an idea of what we should expect and how I should allocate resources. We quickly concluded that we needed to activate Port Security Units. I remember that discussion we had and I was told that two would be available for the 1st District and this was while I was in my role as the RIC; Regional Incident Commander, and made a decision at that point that we should probably disperse them. I shouldn't have both of them in one place. And I thought Boston would be a good idea because then I could have the northern part of the District possibly served by the PSU, and they were enroute and we called them literally while they were in their trucks and said, divert one group and send the PSU up to Boston and one PSU here to New York, and that was a good thing in the end I think.

**Q:** Let me turn that previous question around on you. What were you looking for from your senior leadership; from people above you? Were you looking for them to behave in a reassuring way or an authoritative way? When you look, as District Commander, to your Area Commander and to your Commandant, what do you look for from them? Were you subconsciously or consciously seeing how they reacted to the situation?

**RADM Naccara:** Oh absolutely. I was troubled by their focus on information and to a great detail it's just not available. I tried to depict the scene as well as I could and that included personal observations and discussions with other key folks, trying to describe the ineffectual communications that we had in place. So it literally took a special cell phone for me to communicate with the Commandant or the Area Commander. We couldn't just do it in our normal method. I was not looking for reassurance from them. I wanted them to tell me that if I



# U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

needed additional assets they would provide them to me. That was probably the critical factor right there. When I look to my Area Commander I would like him to respect my request. If I wanted a couple of 270s to come in off of drug interdiction or marine resource work up here I think he should listen to what I have to say and my explanations and then respond, and that's the way it worked. He was very responsive and very understanding of our needs. So in retrospective it was handled well.

**Q:** Admiral Allen mentioned that each District sort of handled their security zones differently. They had these Crisis Task Units in the 8th District and these sectors in the 2nd or the 9th I guess. Did you do that here in the 1st District, divide the District up into security zones to say that these are high priority places, these are less so?

**RADM Naccara:** We did. That's when we were struggling with identifying critical infrastructure. We decided we would do it in three tiers and we would focus our efforts on the highest tier; the First Tier as we call them. We initially asked for input from all of our Commanders in the field and of course everybody came back and said all their critical infrastructure is First Tier.

**Q:** Is that right?

**RADM Naccara:** Well it doesn't work that way so we're going to have to prioritize. And I can recall some of our discussions. They were very animated and much debated, but in the end we all realized we don't have the resources to fully dedicate any kind of presence at everything. So we worked out Tier One, Two and Three and assigned some of our assets to follow up on Tier One. Now what I did, which was different from most Districts, is I felt that right up front we couldn't do this by ourselves and that we had to look for our partners in the broad sense of the term to help us out. So by Friday, which was three days after the event, I had our DG folks making contact with all of the governors of New England, New York and New Jersey; all those states, and I went and visited each one of them personally. Probably the best thing we ever did, certainly for all kinds of future involvement, and to this day I have conversations with a number of governors on many issues which we would never have discussed before.

**Q:** Otherwise, right.

**RADM Naccara:** Otherwise, and they truly appreciated it. We had some staff here from the R&D Center that came just to help us out as far as preparing briefing notes and helping us with operational summaries; mostly information flow and information management. They prepared for me a draft, a photograph – what do you call it - a chart. A little chart of each state and all the Coast Guard units that were available; Coast Guard personnel that were available in those state waters.

**Q:** Uh huh.



# U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

**RADM Naccara:** And I offered this to each one of the Governors and I said, this is what you would normally have as far as Coast Guard assets in regular peacetime. This is what you have today with our high state of readiness. And you should know that we are protecting these different Tier One, Tier Two and Tier Three assets in your state waters, and I am asking you for assistance; your National Guard, organizations such as Emergency Response people. Each state has variations on those themes, and I found the Governors to be extremely willing to help.

**Q:** And most of them have stood up Homeland Security offices since then.

**RADM Naccara:** They have, that's right, full time offices. Many of them had quasi Homeland Defense or security staffs usually led by their senior military from their National Guard and those are Brigadier, or one or two stars normally, but major generals in some cases. But good people to work with and wonderful connections now we've got. I now have the knowledge of tremendous assets that the Guard Forces can bring in each one of our states. And for example a state like Connecticut, very wealthy and very well provisioned. They have some beautiful assets; air and waterborne and overland assets.

**Q:** So you see this as a Port Security Force multiplier if necessary?

**RADM Naccara:** Absolutely. They have helped us in a number of locations. We have used National Guard folks here and State Troopers here with our LNG [liquid natural gas] deliveries in the Port of Boston. Things we could not do without their help.

**Q:** That's two different things there I wanted to touch on, but just to finish up on that, do you . . . you don't see the Coast Guard in any kind of a position ever to do complete port security for every port in the United States, having to rely on these partnerships with other agencies?

**RADM Naccara:** Yes. I can't foresee us as performing all those missions. We would have to be so much larger and I think it's probably a little beyond our mission because it would get down to physical security items and that's not normally our trait. I do believe that if the Federal funding is there that you'll find a willingness from all of the states to help out. Some of the Governors offered their people even in advance of any Federal funding because they could absorb some cost if we needed them in an emergency. You have to realize this was within a week after the first of the terrorist events and they were . . . we were all thinking that the possibility that it could happen again. And some of the governors were saying, I'll give you whatever troops you need at that point whether or not the Federal funding is available. So it was very beneficial.

**Q:** The very first day there was a situation report from the Command Center talks about an LNG vessel ordered out of Boston.

**RADM Naccara:** Yes.



# U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

**Q:** I talked with a fellow at Headquarters who's a chemist; a civilian chemist, who I guess they consulted at some point who had long experience in LNG tankers. Is the LNG tanker, does that represent a public panic threat to you more than a physical threat, because it doesn't seem like from the science that they're all that much of a hazard? Even if you blow one apart they're not really going to do that much damage.

**RADM Naccara:** I've spent more time explaining that to the public and the press than almost any other issue in Boston. I do believe it's the former rather than the latter. But it is a very contentious issue here in Boston and it has been for 30 years. Once I found out that the Mayor has had an issue with LNG delivery since its beginning in 1970 or there about, it made this whole issue much clearer to me. I spent many hours trying to explain through the press to him that the hazards associated with the LNG have been well analyzed and documented. And really we have other products that are probably more dangerous.

**Q:** Right. Not the terrorist weapon of choice, unless you want to cause panic, because it seems like the public has such a bad understanding of the fact that it's not that dangerous.

**RADM Naccara:** That's true. We played into their hands in essence here and we ended up giving far too much attention to the LNG movement here in Boston.

**Q:** Well that's a fascinating point. Do you think that it exacerbated the public concern over LNGs by, in essence, escorting them in with a PSU to the terminal as opposed to just saying, you know . . . ?

**RADM Naccara:** No I think that was necessary and I was told that innumerable times. A couple of interesting vignettes here. One day I was coming back from the base - this was just ten days after the event - and somebody in civilian clothes just happened to be walking by noticing that I was getting out of the Government car and walking up into the building. He ran over to me and said, thank you so much. I can't thank the Coast Guard enough for what you have done for me and what you have done for the city of Boston. Just having your presence out on the water makes us all feel so much safer. And then he just walked away quickly.

I ride the train back and forth to work and people know that I'm in the Coast Guard because I carry my little Coast Guard bag and a few things and they've said the same thing to me. We don't really care about the LNG so much. We just care about the Coast Guard being on the water; just to see you and to see your presence. And it happened to people throughout this District. We had people up in Maine where strangers would walk up to them and say, can I buy you a dinner, or, here, would you come in for a haircut? I don't want to charge you for your haircut. We had the whole north end turn out here for the PSU. A number of restaurants got together and sponsored a whole evening of meals and music and entertainment for the whole PSU and for many people from the ISC down here.

**Q:** Really?



# U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

**RADM Naccara:** It was a stunning event; great proclamations about the Coast Guard. I think that our presence helped to calm the fears of the community, very much so.

**Q:** It's a good point because one of the . . . I think it was one of the fellows on the Strike Team who had a lot of cutter time made the point that when you're on a cutter everybody hates you.

**RADM Naccara:** Yes.

**Q:** They don't want you out there. You're patrolling the fisheries grounds. They want to go out there and fish. You're there to enforce a law that they don't like. And for those eight, ten, twelve weeks they were in New York they could do no wrong. They were bought dinner. It was totally different as a Coastie after 9/11.

**RADM Naccara:** Yes.

**Q:** But on the other side of that is having a Coast Guard ship, which is a Coast Guard cutter in a port, more than say like the *Tahoma* [WMEC-908] which is given the fact that it's a white hull with a racing stripe is a much more reassuring symbol to the public than a gray hull, because the gray hull is a reminder that they're at war, whereas a cutter doesn't carry that same connotation. It's a military vessel without being threatening I guess.

**RADM Naccara:** And I think that's generally true. But I would say that any type of military presence would have been reassuring in those weeks immediately after 9/11. People would not have found a gray hull to be troubling at that point. They were looking for any sign of military.

**Q:** That was certainly true with the Air Force CAP [combat air patrol] over the city.

**RADM Naccara:** Yes, it absolutely was. Whenever I talk about the events, the most vivid description is my coming into the city the next day and seeing no movement in New York, and growing up in that area you never heard of a quiet New York City at any time of day or night. Yet as I looked from - I was in the air coming over the Verazzano- Narrows Bridge - I looked up into New York Harbor, up the Hudson River, and I saw four Coast Guard cutters stationed at different intervals. I saw one or two up the East River and I saw one or two by the Verazzano Bridge, and that was all. There was no other movement on the water. I remember looking in the air and we saw a couple of F-15s, or F-16s and that was all that I saw; very, very, eerie. So that was quite an eerie site for New York City. It's something I'm very unaccustomed to.

One point I wanted to make with my visits to the governors also; Chief, or do I call you Doctor? What do you prefer?

**Q:** I don't think they ever figured that one out. I think they want me to write like a doctor but pay me like a chief.



# U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

**RADM Naccara:** Which is unfortunate. I'm sorry for you.

**Q:** Well you know it's funny. Actually not, because [Coast Guard Chief of Staff Vice] Admiral [Timothy W.] Josiah - I met him a couple of months ago - and he said, boy, I hope you're not taking a real financial hit activating you for a year, and I said, Admiral, Sir, I hate to tell you what college professors are paid but I'm probably making money on this gig.

**RADM Naccara:** Wow, that's disturbing to hear.

**Q:** And I've got a paid education in the Coast Guard organization, which I will carry with me for the rest of my lifetime.

**RADM Naccara:** That's great. One visit to Maine was particularly noteworthy. It was Governor Angus King and I have met with him once or twice before and a few times since then. But the patriot in him came out right away and he said, you know, it's only been a week or so and I've had phone calls from a number of fishermen already up here that said, what can they do to help? And he said, have you thought about using our fishermen as our first line of defense offshore, and I said, what an intriguing thought; things we've used back in World War II.

**Q:** Right.

**RADM Naccara:** And you know that since his suggestion we have worked with the fishing vessel community and we've worked with the FBI and now we have what's called the Coast Watch Program in effect in the State of Maine where we've established an 800 number where anybody can report any anomaly on the shoreline or the near coast area. And we're starting a Coastal Picket Program with the fishing vessels so they can call into the Coast Guard or FBI on anything that they see offshore.

**Q:** Do they get geedunk or something that they can put on their windshield to show that they're . . . ?

**RADM Naccara:** Well not yet. We haven't come up with something tangible yet.

**Q:** That's a terrific idea.

**RADM Naccara:** But they don't need it. Right now everybody is very enthused about this and then the program has now expanded down to Rhode Island and to parts of Massachusetts, and variations on the theme. But we're establishing these numbers for people to call in any kind of an anomaly.

**Q:** And this is all since 9/11?

**RADM Naccara:** It's all since 9/11, yes.





## U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

**Q:** Which has a darker side to it. When it became clear what had happened and who had done it and where these planes had come from, did you get a kind of creepy feeling that these people had essentially been casing Boston for weeks and months leading up to this?

**RADM Naccara:** Yes, we did, and we talked to our intelligence folks here on our staff and with our connections into the other Intel community here in Boston to see if there's something we should be wary of. Should we be checking the movement of passengers in and out of the port in a different way? We were struggling with a lot of issues like that once we realized that two of them had originated in Boston. We were debating the Sea Marshal concept; how could it work here? We were trying to determine what would be a high interest vessel at that early stage. Do we want to stop every vessel before it enters port, board it, and make a quick inspection of the spaces, all kinds of things? Good ideas but we don't have the manpower to be able perform those missions. And we have a lot of high-speed ferries in the Boston area and in the New York area, so there's a movement of people constantly, and what great targets they would be for terrorists; the Staten Island Ferry for example with thousands of people on there each day.

**Q:** Uh huh. How do you in your own mind reconcile the liberty that we take for granted, or did, as Americans with the whole issue of border security?

**RADM Naccara:** We have to rely on intelligence more than ever before and I think that's where we need to invest money for the Coast Guard in particular. But I think for all national resources and we have to share information. I believe there's a lot of information out there that is not shared effectively, which when it is all merged together - fused together, if that's the right term for intelligence - that you might find many more indicators of anomalies. I believe we have to rely on that because of our way of life and what our economy relies upon.

I've been particularly involved with the movement of containers in and out of ports in the 1st District and we've begun three major projects on container security and enhancing border security, focused on that issue in essence, and I think we've got the first meaningful project underway here called Operation Safe Commerce up on the northern borders, and it's focusing on the movement of just one container from Europe over into Canada and then down into the United States through the northern border of Vermont. It's an issue of what you're describing. How do we best determine that these containers are safe and don't contain some kind of a dirty bomb? You may have read about Dr. Steven Flynn's paper. I've spent a lot of time with Steve Flynn up here in the last six months and he's helped us form these projects and they're driven from private-public partnerships and that's what makes them so strong, because we have found industry folks that want to get involved and help in any way they can. They've offered their container shipments as an example, and to come up with some analysis of gaps in security on a container as it moves through this multi-modal transportation system.

**Q:** Sure.



# U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

**RADM Naccara:** And we're doing the same thing in New York with what we call, in New York the Mega Port Project; New York and New Jersey Mega Port Project, where we've got maybe ten or twelve shippers that are involved and interested in joining the project to help us identify better methods of security for that container from its port of origin through its whole transit to its destination.

**Q:** Are we prepared to respond if somebody does sneak a radiation weapon into one of our ports?

**RADM Naccara:** I don't think we are. I think if we discover one of those weapons in our port it's already too late. I think we've got some serious problems. That's why the approach where we build up our border and we put more, whether you call them border guards or Customs agents or whatever, Coast Guard inspectors, it doesn't matter. That's too late. We've got to go back to the point of origin and even with all the sophisticated equipment in the world when it gets to our border it's too late. That has to be done before its left from overseas.

**Q:** Do you see our Strike Teams, for example, who have to respond to these incidents, having to add that to their plate as well?

**RADM Naccara:** Well inevitably, but perhaps its time for some kind of a special team to be designed. We've talked about that. Maybe this was an opportunity for the Coast Guard to step out and say we need some kind of a response team for that purpose alone before the interest wanes, take advantage of it.

**Q:** Exactly. If you had to guess where . . . when I came onboard in December at Headquarters there were ruffles through the building that we were going to be part of a Soviet-style bound border agency that, there were going to be all these sorts of consolidations and so forth, which eventually didn't pan out. Do you see the Coast Guard retaining its current shape for very much longer?

**RADM Naccara:** That's a difficult question because the border agency has resurfaced in the last two weeks, and the statements by the President just over the last few days lead me to believe that he's considering the Border Service, INS and Customs Service but not Coast Guard. Now I'll say in my opinion - and this is my opinion - that's a mistake. I think if they do form a new border agency without the Coast Guard we'll be left behind. I think while there may be some traps and some problems in moving into an agency like that, I think for us to fight that off may be an error in judgment. I don't know for sure. That's just my opinion. You know while we've experienced great support with this administration and this Transportation Department - the leaders that we have today - I don't know if that will endure and much of the increased budget is already earmarked. It isn't that meaningful an increase in the end.



# U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

**Q:** Right, so I guess the ultimate question is, if that were the case, you see that ultimately, whether its fisheries or law enforcement or drug interdictions, those will all be essentially reclassified as border security issues?

**RADM Naccara:** I agree Chief, and as a matter of fact we tried to describe in the weeks right after 9/11 all of our missions as part of homeland security and port security being that one little slice of it only, and I think it would be certainly damaging to the Coast Guard if you were to break us up in any way. The whole Coast Guard should remain an entity. That way I think that's a good strong marketing point that all of our missions enhance homeland security and I think it should stay that way.

**Q:** Well Admiral, I know you've got things to do and I want to thank you very much for your time. Is there is anything else that you wanted to add? If you had some thoughts you wanted to share?

**RADM Naccara:** You talked a little bit about what we might do in the future and I thought that we, in addition to fusing intelligence, we have different methods of gaining a better Maritime Domain Awareness. I do like that term, and it's something we've been struggling with over the last few months. But there are many enhancements that could relatively easily be accomplished for us to have a much improved Maritime Domain Awareness. We have worked with the Navy up here. We discovered since 9/11 that the Navy from Brunswick Naval Air Station up in Maine runs two round trips per day from the Canadian border all the way to Norfolk and we asked them if they would mind in letting us know what vessels were in the near-shore environment. There are some problems with that and our lawyers have cringed a bit when we worry about DoD assets looking at our own people; the *Posse Comitatus* issue. But I do believe that a doctrine could be prepared which would allow them to perform that mission for us every day and for us to . . . and we've already worked on the technology enhancements that would allow us to have real time information from those aircraft. These are P-3s and they're very capable, and then we've already proven it to be possible . . .

**Q:** Which they almost gave us 15 years ago anyway.

**RADM Naccara:** Yes, that's right. Maybe a couple of them we did have for a little bit, and the fishermen effort and the near-shore effort with the Coast Watch and the Coastal Beacon things. We've looked to all of our partners to help. I do believe, and interesting enough, President Bush was up here in Maine, I guess it was in January, to thank the Coast Guard. A wonderful day that was for us. We walked below on the *Tahoma* and we were looking at - this was in CIC - we looked at a couple of repeaters and we had an outline of the New England coastline and he asked us, now can you see all the ships offshore on this display, and we said no, not really. We don't have that kind of a radar system available. But I said, you know, there is a potential fix and it has to do with fishing vessels that we have under this Voluntary Management System; VMS. We have almost 300 fishing vessels that voluntarily carry around a transponder, which allows the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Coast Guard to view them in real time, any



# U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

place they go with this transponder on. It's helping us for so many reasons. It's certainly . . . we can watch these fishing vessels as they literally walk along the border of these closed areas and every once in a while they'll cut a corner.

**Q:** Sure.

**RADM Naccara:** And we could take them to task if we thought it was necessary, but we don't always do that. And of course in order for you to prosecute something you've got to have somebody on the water eventually, or in the air. But nevertheless this allows us to learn a little bit more about our Maritime Domain. So I mentioned this to the President. He says, wow, why don't we require that of every ship? I said, Mr. President, we've been trying to do that for years. So then the Secretary chimes in and he says, why don't we take that to IMO? And already there are things in place. They call it AIS; Automated Information System. And we've got a derivative of that developing for our VTS replacement in the country. It's in place in parts of the Mississippi. It'll be in place in Valdez and all of our VTSs. But that will only be in those pilotage waters that we've defined. It would cost us very little money to provide all of our U.S. flag vessels, even fishing vessels, with one of these transponders.

**Q:** Now would it be possible – and I don't want to sound like Tom Clancy - you're looking at a frequency I assume on the transponder?

**RADM Naccara:** Yes.

**Q:** So would it be possible for somebody, if you've got, you know, the *Junna-B* fishing boat, to take the *Junna-B*'s transponder and put it on another vessel and you think you're watching the 50-foot *Junna-B* out of New Bedford and it's really a warship.

**RADM Naccara:** That is possible, of course. That's why you still need the presence.

**Q:** Sure.

**RADM Naccara:** But it would go a long way in helping you to find out what's out there in your waters.

**Q:** Absolutely. And the fishermen who are traditionally . . . I mean I went to school at the University of Rhode Island. Those guys aren't such a fun bunch often times. Have they stepped up and are willingly participating?

**RADM Naccara:** Well you know I've seen an evolution in just the two years here that I've been involved and they're starting to appreciate the Coast Guard presence much more than ever before.

**Q:** Uh huh.



# U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

**RADM Naccara:** They wanted us back out there after 9/11. They knew we were not out there. Sure that allowed some people to break the law because there was no presence. But I think overall they have all noted the improvement in the fishery stocks because of the proper management, and that requires reasonable rules and a presence offshore.

**Q:** Right.

**RADM Naccara:** And you can't do that necessarily with a drone and you can't do that with a satellite. You do have to have somebody on the water.

**Q:** A human being.

**RADM Naccara:** Yes, at some point. And they realized that having the Coast Guard around as a search and rescue presence is a nice reassuring thing for them.

**Q:** Sure.

**RADM Naccara:** So it's been a good relationship and much more of the latter than the former attitude that we didn't want anybody around.

**Q:** Right.

**RADM Naccara:** So that's a positive side.

**Q:** That's fascinating. I brought this along. This was my . . . it came out last summer. I thought that you might like a copy of that Sir.

**RADM Naccara:** Wow!

**Q:** A book about Thor Heyerdahl and the expeditions that happened after Kontiki.

**RADM Naccara:** Oh, well thank you very much. Oh, very nice.

**Q:** So that just . . . I like to show the senior leadership that we historians don't sit around doing absolutely nothing. We publish once in a while.

**RADM Naccara:** Well I think there's great value in what you're doing here and I wish we had done this before. I think we might even talk about this now in the context of our District staff.

**Q:** Well we lost a lot by picking up so late, but as Captain Karonis says, nobody will be able to say that we didn't do it for 9/11, and to really change the Coast Guard culture, which is what it's going to require because you've got hard charging operational officers. You know, I can't deal with that stuff, you know, that's PA [Public Affairs] stuff.



# U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

**RADM Naccara:** Uh huh.

**Q:** As you've got to separate history from PA and you've got to let them know that this is part of *esprit de corp*.

**RADM Naccara:** Sure it is.

**Q:** That *esprit de corp* relies on heritage and without heritage you don't have an organization.

**RADM Naccara:** That's true.

**Q:** So that's going to take many years and they're going to have to get used to, you know . . . we had a Joint Staff meeting with the Joint History folks and we do a little bit of stuff with them, with General Armstrong's folks, and they just finished a deployment to Bosnia, some of their historians. And the way the Army does it, there's a sign on the door: "You can't go home until you've talked to the historian."

**RADM Naccara:** Wow!

**Q:** So they all sit down and they've got to do their debrief with the historian, whether it's classified or unclas, and it goes into the file and gets sent in the mailbag and gets sent back home. So at least it's captured.

**RADM Naccara:** That's great.

**Q:** So the plan now is, as I say, stand up these new historians, hopefully one in each District, and have these documentation teams that would collect the basic primary data and that would eventually filter up and create a picture of the organization. We haven't done that for 50 years. So you're not going to see the results of that for five years. You're not going to see a change in the culture I don't think for ten years or more. But if they start it, it'll happen.

**RADM Naccara:** That's great.

**Q:** So what's on your plate Admiral? Where do you go from here?

**RADM Naccara:** I'm retiring in about a month.

**Q:** Is that right?

**RADM Naccara:** Yes.

**Q:** Any plans?



# U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

**RADM Naccara:** Yes, I have a job down in the [Washington] DC area. I'm going to be the Federal Security Director at Dulles Airport.

**Q:** Oh, congratulations. So you're going to be in my neck of the woods. I've got a place in Alexandria [Virginia] for the year.

**RADM Naccara:** Oh really?

**Q:** They just cranked up the flight schedule out of Reagan National [Airport] so they're flying right over my apartment.

**RADM Naccara:** Oh Yes. Yes, I have a home down in Fairfax [Virginia]. I've been stationed at Headquarters a few times so that won't be too far from home. Well it's been nice to talk to you. If you have any questions on the follow-up please call me.

**Q:** I probably will have some things to follow-up on. I'm collecting data until the end of May. I've got to go to Hawaii to talk to [Commander, Pacific Area Vice] Admiral [Ernest R.] Riutta and [Commander, Fourteenth Coast Guard District Rear] Admiral [Ralph D.] Utley in May and [Commander, Seventeenth Coast Guard District Rear] Admiral [Thomas J.] Barrett on the way back, and then I'll start writing June 1st. If you don't mind, if I can follow-up at some point with you, I'm sure I'll have some questions?

**RADM Naccara:** No, please do. I feel like this has been such a cursory review.

**Q:** Well it is, and it's almost out of necessity. Ideally we do five or six, especially with you and Admiral Bennis and Admiral Allen we would have sat down for anywhere from 10 to 20 hours. But again, you know, it's what we can do in six months. But if I could follow-up that would be a big help.

**RADM Naccara:** Of course, please do that.

**Q:** Thank you, Sir.

**RADM Naccara:** Good luck to you and thanks for the book.

**END OF INTERVIEW**