



# U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

*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: Vice Admiral Thomas H. Collins, USCG  
Vice Commandant\*\***



\*\*(Admiral Collins became Commandant of the Coast Guard in June of 2002. He was promoted to the rank of Admiral upon assuming that office.)

Interviewer: PAC Peter Capelotti, USCGR  
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**Place: Vice Commandant's Office  
U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters  
Washington, DC**

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**Q:** Sir, I wanted to start by asking you a bit about how you found yourself on the day before September 11th; what kind of issues you were working through and what kind of things occupied your time on September 10th, before all of this happened?

**VADM Collins:** It was fairly standard. You know the standard Mark 1, MOD 0, Coast Guard day in Headquarters; selected meetings and moving paper. There was nothing, in my recollection, terribly outstanding about the 10th.

**Q:** What's a typical day like for you? When do you get to the office? How do you arrive?

**VADM Collins:** I'm in usually by seven o'clock and out by six/six-thirty on a good day and a little later on a busier days. Frequently there may be some representational requirements during the evening two or three times a week.

**Q:** If you were to describe to someone who knew nothing about the Coast Guard what the Vice Commandant does, how would you describe it?

**VADM Collins:** It's a mystery. No, it's obviously the support for the Commandant; standing in for the Commandant when he's not available and processing a good deal of the paper that flows through the front office, not all of which goes to the Commandant. Some gets stopped and signed at my desk and reviewed.

I'm also the Agency Acquisition Executive. I oversee all the major systems acquisitions that are ongoing and I approve all the appropriate planning requirements documentation and the acquisition strategy, and the social evaluation process oversight; all that, and that's pretty extensive. And these past couple of years I was heavily involved in the Integrated Deepwater Project. But that's considerable.

I'm also the prime liaison for the Coast Guard Foundation and the Alumni Association, and all that interplays with those organizations.

**Q:** Has the Historical Foundation put the touch on you yet to interface with them?

**VADM Collins:** I have a brochure. I am not a member yet. I need to be. I plan to be. But they have communicated to me in writing. I've visited their little museum out there in Seattle, and of course we are in the middle of trying to establish a national museum, as you probably know.

**Q:** Yes. Were you here that morning of September 11th?

**VADM Collins:** Well it was interesting. I had a very early appointment at Bethesda Naval Medical Hospital before coming into work - I live in close proximity to the hospital - but I just had a routine medical appointment. So I was coming in that morning and had the radio on in my car when the first plane hit and I heard it reported over the radio. And you know, it was a very cryptic report at that point, and my first reaction was, well, it was one of those little Cessna's,



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you know, small planes. That maybe it was bad visibility or something and ran into it. And that was all that was known, just on the radio, that the plane had hit the building and not much more.

**Q:** It's amazing how everyone's perceptions have changed over the last six months where you hear about something like that and the automatic impulse now is terrorism.

**VADM Collins:** Right.

**Q:** Whereas the impulse on September 11th was, it must be an accident.

**VADM Collins:** Yeah, it must be an accident. That was my first response because there was no description of the plane. There was no detailed description of the site. All it was, was plane hits building, okay?

**Q:** What did you find when you got here?

**VADM Collins:** When I came in my Aide was standing at the doorway here and headed to the TV over here. They had the TV on and there was the picture of . . . and my Aide said, this is a fairly substantial plane that hit this, and it was the first Tower with smoke billowing out.

**Q:** Yes.

**VADM Collins:** As I walked into the room - it was live on TV; a live shot, real time - the second plane flew into the second Tower. I saw it fly in. I said, oh my God, terrorists. That was my immediate reaction.

**Q:** There was no doubt in your mind at that point?

**VADM Collins:** No doubt in my mind that that was a, you know . . . you could see that the first Tower hit had substantial smoke and substantial damage. That wasn't done by a Cessna - number one - was my first reaction. And two, when the second plane flew in - it obviously was a passenger jet that flew into the second Tower - you knew that there was some evil doing going on.

**Q:** You were here with your Aide?

**VADM Collins:** Right.

**Q:** You're 20 feet or so from Admiral [James] Loy's office [ADM Loy was the Commandant of the Coast Guard at that time].

**VADM Collins:** Right.

**Q:** When did things start to coalesce among the senior leadership?



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**VADM Collins:** Well shortly thereafter - the Commandant was out somewhere. I forget. He was just coming in. He had a meeting or something, and within 15 minutes or so, as I recall, he had returned in time, not too distant from the event - he came in that morning and we chatted, and he said, well there are some real security implications for our Service here in that there could be a long sustained requirement for a high level of operations from our organization.

**Q:** Yes.

**VADM Collins:** And given that . . . it was a very early decision; a discussion and decision, and obviously we talked about Reserve call-up and agreed that that was something we needed to do right away. And one of the first orders of business was for the Commandant to call the Secretary, who by that time had maybe an hour after the event or so; hour and a half, was embroiled in the whole management of air space; close down of air space, and in close proximity with the Vice President on all those issues. But the Commandant; Adm Loy, did in fact get in touch with the Secretary.

**Q:** Were you there when he was on the phone with him?

**VADM Collins:** I was outside the office in close proximity.

**Q:** Yes.

**VADM Collins:** But it was a short telephone conversation and it was basically what we were doing, which was mobilizing assets; our own assets, into New York, ensuring we established a Command and Control presence there, and the fact that we felt that other ports beyond New York would require a heightened state of security, and that we would ask for permission for a Reserve call-up. So that happened that first morning without any agonizing over it. It was the fact that when that happened, and then closely followed by the Pentagon, which I could see the smoke; the crash and then the smoke right outside my window here over across the river . . .

**Q:** Was there a sense of that explosion when that happened?

**VADM Collins:** No, I didn't. I got a report that the Pentagon was hit and looked out and you could see the smoke billowing. Then the report of the plane over Pennsylvania a little bit later, and that, cumulatively, you know we said, what do we have here?

**Q:** Yes.

**VADM Collins:** So you really didn't know what you had. You know it was terribly different and a higher state of security would be required, and maybe for a sustained period of time. Because I don't think the Nation knew exactly what we had in front of us; that would confront us, or where the next shoe would fall; an expectation that clearly our world of work - recognition very, very early - our world of work was going to be materially changed for some time.



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**Q:** Did you have a sense of that that morning? Did the senior leadership realize that this was a new world immediately, or was this something that came out over the next several days or weeks?

**VADM Collins:** I don't recall whether it was, you know, one flash. I think it was an accumulation of a couple of days. But I think it was very, very early on that we recognized that high OPTEMPO over time sustained the threat over time for the maritime environment and that it wasn't going to be business as usual.

**Q:** Yes.

**VADM Collins:** And so there was early communications with our Operations and our Marine Safety folks, and obviously dialogue and telephone calls with the Area Commanders, and, you know, all mobilizing to put resources where we felt the primary threats were.

At that time Boston and New York sort of were the center of the 1st District where things were happening and that was the primary focus for a number of days. We had recurring telephone conferences with the 1st District Commander and with the Activities Commander in New York on the situation. Typically it would be a morning and an afternoon type of a dialogue with them on the current situation and it involved things like the port being shut down for a number of days in New York. They were redirecting passenger vessels into Boston that were destined for New York and selected other ports as I recall. I think Port Everglades was another port that was shut down at the request of the Port Authority.

And the other things like . . . we have a security regime for large capacity passenger vessels; cruise ships. They have a special set of security by law, based on the *Achille Lauro* incident back in the Eighties; the Legislation passed. But they had . . . let's see, we had a security regime; three levels of security for them; the third level requiring 100 percent baggage screening and passenger screening and that kind of thing, and a step up of security in and around the terminal, in the ship, and that was done post haste in the wake of 9/11. So those kind of things we were . . . and in the meantime in New York, of course [Rear] Admiral [Richard E.] Bennis and the District Commander; [RADM] George Naccara [III], were orchestrating support to the people in New York, which involved things like, you know, immediately the evacuation of a number of fairly substantial; 100,000, something like that, people off the southern tip of Manhattan. Now we didn't physically do it but we did some of it on our ships. But there was the coordination function and there were tugs and ferries and platforms of opportunity that took people off the southern tip of Manhattan, so all those things were going on. And of course we are a response organization - as you know - by trade. We have Op Centers and communications channels and Crisis Action Centers, and those things were all mobilized ASAP; immediately, and we manned those up, you know, put our battledress on type of thing approach to the incident. And from that respect I think that things worked like they should work.

Reflecting back on that, how we redirected - I don't know - over 50 cutters for example, that were either on a Bravo status or were deployed in a fisheries mission or counter-drug, they were



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redirected into most of the major ports in and around our country and stayed there for a number of weeks.

**Q:** Yes.

**VADM Collins:** And that was, again, not knowing . . .

**Q:** When the next shoe was going to fall.

**VADM Collins:** You just didn't know. And so one of the things is in a response organization you send the stuff. You know, don't hesitate. Send the stuff! You always can call them back, but send the stuff and be prepared for a worst case scenario. So that's what we were doing. And over those first couple of months I was feeling that out. And again, the daily communications and conferences between Area Commanders and Headquarters went on there for a good month and a half/two months where there would be the Commandant, myself, the Chief of Staff, "O", you know, Office of Operations, the Office of Marine Safety and others, frequently two times a day dialoguing with the Area Commanders and selected District Commanders, depending upon the situation, discussing the day's event and what adjustments that they were making and how Reserves were being used and all those kind of things.

**Q:** Let me ask you personally what you looked toward or for, or about? We're six/seven months on now; we know, for example, that you're going to be the next Commandant; something that wasn't known on September 11th. Had you submitted your package, for lack of a better phrase, at that point?

**VADM Collins:** No, that was another month or so after the event; month and half, when an application was actually submitted for the Secretary's consideration.

**Q:** Let me ask you, this was a national crisis at the time compared, in some respects, to Pearl Harbor. You must have been thinking about this at some point that this might be a job that you might want to apply for. Did you look to the Commandant in those days to see how he responded to this? Was that something that you studied as a senior leader?

**VADM Collins:** I mean you can't obviously observe . . . number one; he's a great leader. I think he's done just an absolutely tremendous job. He's very proactive; out in front. You know his motto is preparation with performance and he really lives that every day. And very thoughtful about next steps; thinking through every detail, but doing it in a collaborative way, seeking participation and input, and posturing the organization for the future; whether that's tomorrow or the next week and through the event.

You know very, very early we were talking about sustainment for example; how do we sustain this and what's the level of Reserves that we can call up and sustain over time.

**Q:** If there were a similar type situation . . . what do you take from those first few days, that you might apply as you go forward yourself?



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**VADM Collins:** Well I think some of our characteristics came to the fore as an organization. I mean some fundamental principles of our organization have been time tested since 1790 and they shined again. I mean the fact; number one: we are a very adaptive organization. Our military nature; our 7 by 24 Command and Control structure and communications, and multi-mission platforms that can do fish. They can do drugs. They can do law enforcement in the ports. They can do regattas. You know they're not a one trick pony.

**Q:** There's a phrase that every Marine's a rifleman. Is there such a unifying principle in the USCG? Is every Coast Guardsman an 'adaptive multi-mission . . .' ?

**VADM Collins:** I haven't thought of the appropriate phrase there. I think what we are is a very adaptive and flexible organization, and we very rarely create a single purpose platform. We very rarely create a single-purpose Coastie.

**Q:** Right.

**VADM Collins:** They are versatile multi-mission.

**Q:** And do you trace that back to [Secretary of the Treasury Alexander] Hamilton?

**VADM Collins:** Way back, oh yeah. It's been characteristic of our organization and I think it serves the Nation very, very well. And I think, again, the latest example is 9/11, is where you could take a cutter that was extensively dedicated to fisheries enforcement or counter-drug enforcement, and all of a sudden it's a Command and Control platform - the *Tahoma* for example in New York - for an extended period, coordinating with multiple agencies and doing it very, very effectively. We're not an inward looking organization. We're outward and a collaborative organization. And so all those combined characteristics played out I think and are still playing out, I think to the benefit of the nation. So I think it was a reinforcing thing.

**Q:** Did it expose . . . ?

**VADM Collins:** Some weaknesses and gaps.

**Q:** Yes, sir. Did we experience weaknesses a result of, you name it; streamlining, attrition?

**VADM Collins:** I think it was a function of . . . we had a capacity problem.

**Q:** Yes.

**VADM Collins:** You know, head count, and we still have a head count problem, I mean given the vulnerabilities, the threats and so forth that exist in 361 ports and 95,000 miles of coastline.

**Q:** Have we decided that we can't defend, for lack of a better word, all of those, all the time?



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**VADM Collins:** From the beginning we've taken a risk-based approach to the allocation of our resources so that we allocate to the highest risk, and that remains the case. So you pursue a risk-based approach. You don't want to be terribly predictable and have the same resource at the same place at the same time every day. That's not a good deterrent posture. You don't do that. And very early recognition of partnerships and outreach with other government agencies, both horizontally and vertically. In other words, not only other Federal agencies, but also state and local is in order; partnered so we can leverage everyone's scarce resources to ensure security.

But also with the private sector. The private sector has a big responsibility to ensure the proper security for their facilities in the waterfront or their ships, and that they are part of the solution set. It's not just the Coast Guard. It's not just the Federal government. It's not just state and local government. It is all of that, and the private sector, working together in a coordinated way.

And then there's another level of partnership and that's international. Much of the solution to this is an international solution.

**Q:** Yes.

**VADM Collins:** I mean most of the ships that call on our ports are foreign ships; foreign flag vessels, coming from foreign nations, crewed with foreign folks, with cargos coming all over the world in containers and other forms. So clearly it's an international solution as well as anything. And that was very, very clear why Admiral Loy sought out the general assembly of IMO that fall to address them of security in, I think, a very proactive way. To introduce security as a major headliner for IMO, which had here before been focused primarily on safe navigation, environmental protection and those kinds of things. And our pitch was, we need a security overlay and a focus on IMO, which led to the follow-on intercessional work groups in February and another work group in May, with hopefully results by the next fall on specific initiatives to ensure the container security of worldwide shipping. I'm just mentioning that, that that is a . . . we took a very proactive approach recognizing that, and I'll steal Jim Loy's term here, "This is an all hands affair." In other words, the security issue is so immense. There's no one agency. There's no one level of government; no one country can solve this, and it needs strong partnerships. That was one of the natural reactions to resource limitations in the scale of the problem is that you need strong partnerships.

But there were other specific gaps that needed resource help. I mean we had, again, we had a head count problem. It's a capacity problem. We had a small boat problem in terms of capacity in our ports and waterways.

We had communication shortfalls. In other words, none of our Captain of the Ports had secure communications; SIPERNET into the Captain of the Ports. There was clearly the ability to share, in a robust way, information between agencies with real time food for the tactical use of the local port and strategic use of those up the chain. Now there were some huge gaps there.

**Q:** Yes.





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**VADM Collins:** And the other issue that was clearly recognized very, very early on was the sustainment problem; that we couldn't sustain this over time without Reservists for close to a 12-month period. And we called up, what, at the height of it, 2,700 Reservists. It represents mid-30s, something like that, percent of our Reserve strength.

**Q:** It took me three months to find that number. We had 984 Reservists on Extended Active Duty on September 10th. So if you add the 2,700 at post-9/11 height, we were up to almost 47 percent of the Reserve.

**VADM Collins:** That's tough to sustain over time. But all those issues came on our plate real early and within days we were thinking of those things, and it's all about preparation to perform this type of thinking, of how do you sustain this over time? How do you address these? So there are international initiatives. There are inter-governmental initiatives. There were budget initiatives that were launched and planning initiatives. Very early we started to develop key objectives that would underpin our strategy for Homeland Security and step up real early to be the maritime lead for Homeland Security. And again, my hat's off to Jim Loy on the very proactive approach he took, and very early on met with Governor Ridge up in Harrisburg - before he was even in town and took the office - just to give him some flavor of what we could bring to the table and how we could offer our help and assistance, and also some observations on the interagency process within Washington.

Of course the Commandant has a couple other hats he wears. He's the U.S. Interdiction Coordinator for drug strategies. [ed-This is no longer the case.] So that's some observations of the interagency process that he ran into in that capacity. Those were all things that were shared. So very, very early, the outreach and the partnering part, whether it's the new office of Homeland Security or whatever it was; international or with other agencies, was a key feature of our approach.

Another strong partner was the Navy of course. The Commandant's first call was to Secretary [of Transportation Norman Y.] Mineta. His second telephone conversation he had, and it was a call from, I believe it was not the Commandant calling the CNO but the CNO calling the Commandant as I recall, offering any assistance that the Navy could provide.

**Q:** Was there a sense then that this was going on two tracks; that you had Homeland Defense on the one side and Homeland Security on the other? It seems like the Coast Guard straddles this fence as to how much of a defense organization we are and how much of a security organization? Does the senior leadership think in those ways or how to define those?

**VADM Collins:** We think about, very early . . . in fact we tried from a planning perspective to put things in the right cubby hole and really we created a special task force led by RADM [Robert F.] Duncan do some brainstorming and thinking, and strategizing on this. They worked for several weeks and developed a fairly good report that we used as a foundation for our ultimate strategy documents that we formulated here. In those plans I was thinking about the



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whole security thing as a continuum from awareness, prevention, response, to consequence and management; a sort of a flow.

**Q:** Yes.

**VADM Collins:** And at 9/11 at the World Trade Center you were on the right hand side of that. I mean you were on the consequence management side.

**Q:** Right.

**VADM Collins:** The awareness, prevention and response . . .

**Q:** Was over. It was irrelevant to the event.

**VADM Collins:** Well it didn't work because there was no awareness and there was no prevention obviously.

**Q:** Right.

**VADM Collins:** Now where you would like to be is on the awareness and prevention side of that dynamic.

**Q:** Yes, sir.

**VADM Collins:** Oh by the way, most of our strategy is investing in the awareness and prevention side of the maritime.

**Q:** Since 9/11 you're saying?

**VADM Collins:** Yes, since 9/11. But I'm using that to say most of the Department of Defense's role, as its evolving, would be in the NorthCom, which is the new CINC command that's going to be formed.

**Q:** Do we have a structure or an admiral going to them that would represent the Coast Guard?

**VADM Collins:** Not yet. We don't have that nailed down yet. There is a high likelihood that we could have a Coast Guard flag officer in the staff.

**Q:** Yes.

**VADM Collins:** But that Staff and Joint Forces Command, which is now the agent for their Homeland Security; Department of Defense's response to Homeland Security, is heavily into the consequence management side.

**Q:** Yes.



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**VADM Collins:** And they view most of the leads for Homeland Security in Federal agencies, which they will assist on the scale of the incident, as such that it overwhelms the particular lead Federal agencies. That's sort of their . . . it's not exclusively that, but that's probably the lion's share of their view on their role.

**Q:** Yes.

**VADM Collins:** They're also, of course, heavily into the air defense monitoring side of the equation.

**Q:** Sure.

**VADM Collins:** You know, that's the NORAD legacy and so forth. So that is their primary focus, and they would come to bear if there were substantial threats of a naval force coming in, or those kinds of things.

**Q:** A container full of Al Qaeda guys landing at the docks or something.

**VADM Collins:** Which is not the MO here.

**Q:** Right.

**VADM Collins:** I mean that's not the MO. We're not going to get attacked by a naval fleet.

**Q:** Not a conventional one certainly.

**VADM Collins:** No, not a conventional one. So the response on the awareness . . . but they can play a role in the awareness side and help in the prevention side, and that's the discussion the CNO and the Commandant had, is how the Navy could assist in those kind of roles that we had.

**Q:** Does the senior leadership have a clear idea of when they would call in the Navy? I mean there was some discussion afterwards, would the Coast Guard become part of the Navy and so forth.

**VADM Collins:** Well we've already called in the Navy in effect, and we've already joined with it.

**Q:** But before 9/11?

**VADM Collins:** Yeah. Well the relationship was defined and it was evolved over the entire history of our nation; the relationship between . . . and mostly it's been the Coast Guard going to the Navy to provide Coast Guard assets to the Navy during a war or a crisis, or whatever, and we've been engaged in every major naval action in the nation's history in one way or another in an augmentation role.



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**Q:** Yes.

**VADM Collins:** And of course, as you know, the local law provides that in time of war we can actually be transferred to the Navy from the Department of Transportation. The last time that happened was in World War II. But it has always been us augmenting the Navy almost exclusively, and we have, over the last few years, we have sent Port Security Units to the Arabian Gulf and we have sent ships to the Arabian Gulf. There is an MOU signed between the Secretary of the Navy and Secretary of Transportation in 1995 that defined our relationship between the Coast Guard and the Navy, and allowed the Commandant and the CNO, under certain conditions, to engage and exchange resources and assist without any by-your-leave up the chain. It was based upon this MOU and it said, okay, the Coast Guard will augment the Navy in selected niche areas and they had to do with Port Security and Marine Interdiction operations and Environmental Defense operations, and the like. There were four or five annexes that defined how we would bring certain skill sets that inherently reside in us in our peacetime mission. That those same skill sets can be brought to bear in selected defense operations overseas and elsewhere in that it's a natural for us in our partnership with the Navy to augment in these areas. That was pre-9/11.

**Q:** Yes.

**VADM Collins:** Within the first week the Commandant and I met with the CNO, the Vice CNO, and the Secretary of the Navy to discuss our relationship and going forward, and it was a very collaborative, congenial, you know, true partnership type of discussion. How can we work together in the best interest, continue to work and expand the already good relationship we have? One was to continue to pursue a relationship between the Coast Guard's Intel Coordination Center and ONI, Office of Naval Intelligence, which had already been put in place over the year, and sharing information on ships and marine threats, and it was supported by an MOU. We agreed to rapidly expand that Intel relationship, which we had already had a fairly good one. And by the way, that served us very well over the last six/seven months. To keep that going we called it Maritime Domain Awareness issues, but that was both committing to that. The other was a recognition that we needed a two-way street instead of a one way street. In other words it wasn't Coast Guard assets going to the Navy. That in the Maritime Homeland Security; the extent of that threat; the dimensions of that threat, required Navy/Coast Guard working together and Navy assets coming to us when appropriate to assist in that role.

**Q:** Would it be safe to say that's the first time in the history of the relationship between the two?

**VADM Collins:** I don't know. It's unprecedented in my career and I don't know if there are examples of that through time. In modern history I don't recall it ever happening. But we have, in fact, taken tactical control of Navy PCs in the LANT and PAC area where the Navy tactically chops those assets to us. They're Navy manned, Navy funded, but under the tactical control of the Captain of the Port or District Commander.



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**Q:** Does this interfere with this idea that seems to be, at least from some of the officers I've talked too when you speak of things like Deepwater, having a platform that can do many missions and you would put a crew on it for that mission? You wouldn't necessarily have this kind of cohesive long term . . .

**VADM Collins:** Well when we brought those PCs in, one of the initial concerns of the Navy and us was the proper Use of Force approach.

**Q:** Yes.

**VADM Collins:** You know it's different than their Rules of Engagement in a wartime environment and a peacetime environment. We have our own Use of Force as promulgated in our Law Enforcement Manual and other documents. So there was an orientation and a training thing that accompanied each one of those vessels coming over. And in addition we put Coast Guard people on there as coordinators for awhile to ease that transition, and I think it's worked very, very well.

In addition to the close relationship on the Intel side and in addition to the vessels that have been tactically shipped in, there's also - like in Puget Sound - a Harbor Defense Command that is within Puget Sound's area of control of the 13th Coast Guard District up there, as well as some surveillance units and alike. So there are other assets that have been exchanged.

**Q:** Yes.

**VADM Collins:** And that was, again, it was reflected in that second telephone conversation the Commandant had of that morning of 9/11 with the CNO is that, how can I help? Anything I have is, you know, you tell me what you need and we'll support it. So there's been a very strong partnership and a collaborative one between our Services, and I think that's great news for the country.

**Q:** How often do you meet with the Navy liaison?

**VADM Collins:** There is a Staff meeting that recurs.

**Q:** But how unusual would an impromptu call be between the Coast Guard and the Navy?

**VADM Collins:** The only set periodic one is every six months there's a thing called a NAVGUARD Board; Navy-Coast Guard Board, co-chaired by myself and the Vice CNO, and then we've selected flag officers from our Staff. There's an agenda and we work through common issues, and obviously we had the last one in April and were heavy into Homeland Security issues and partnerships. But that happens every six months. But in between, the staffs are meetings on a recurring basis to discuss issues and collaborate on issues.



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There's, for instance, our Integrated Deepwater Systems Project; the Project Officer, or Program Office, is engaged with the Navy on a recurring basis working through some of the partnering details associated with that, is just one example.

Then again, the Commandant has frequent exposure over in the Pentagon. He goes to many tank meetings with the other Service Chiefs and that's done on a recurring basis. When the Service Chiefs meet with the President, which they do a couple times a year, he attends with them. And he has luncheon type meetings with the CNO through the course of the year off and on where they discuss certain things. So there is a continual dialogue.

**Q:** You say you put in your packet about a month after 9/11. Did 9/11 enter into your thinking at all when you decided to apply for the job?

**VADM Collins:** No, it wasn't something that was a key factor quite frankly.

**Q:** Let me ask the question in another way. Do you think it had anything to do with your selection?

**VADM Collins:** I don't know, to tell you the truth.

**Q:** Not that you could answer that question, but just your sense.

**VADM Collins:** No. There may - and this is only speculation and nothing more - because the Secretary didn't tell me why he picked me. He just told me he picked me and I thought that was good enough.

**Q:** But clearly security issues of the kind that we're talking about were . . .

**VADM Collins:** He maybe thought that some level of continuity may have been important. That's speculative on my part. I don't know. But the event was, you know, I would have probably put in a package whether the event happened or not.

**Q:** But you're clearly being handed a different world as a result.

**VADM Collins:** Very much.

**Q:** Does that change how you see your role now?

**VADM Collins:** Clearly. I mean our world of work has materially changed and the nature of the mission priorities has shifted. We have to get the maritime component of Homeland Security right for the Nation. That is an incredibly important priority. And so we see the Search and Rescue and Homeland Security as sort of the five star primo missions that we have to get right.

**Q:** Yes.



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**VADM Collins:** We have to maintain the highest state of readiness. So really the mission *du jour* for me going in and the highest priority is to build out and develop our readiness posture in Homeland security, and we're not there yet.

**Q:** No.

**VADM Collins:** I mean there are a number of gaps. It's no one's fault. It's a matter of resources. It's a matter of getting people in the right place. All those kind of things have to be done and that's probably the biggest job ahead.

**Q:** Do you see that whole job being finished on your watch?

**VADM Collins:** I think building it out and gaining the readiness level we need is reachable within the next four years. We have presented and discussed with the Secretary a three-year plan to build out the new competencies and capability for Homeland Security. The first installation of that is the '03 budget that's now in front of Congress, which is a good step forward. It's a 2,200 person increase, some additional boats and secure communications, and a whole bunch of other capabilities that we really need to address this issue, including Port Vulnerability Assessments around selected ports and that kind of thing. So that's the first step of a multi-tiered effort. And if we're successful in getting budgetary support; if it stops at '03 then we're not going to make it.

**Q:** Yes.

**VADM Collins:** If the spigot gets turned off at '03 then there's no way that we'll do it.

**Q:** Do you think there's a danger, or do you sense a danger, as 9/11 recedes into the past that the American public in general, Congress in particular, sort of says . . . ?

**VADM Collins:** There's always that, you know, there's sort of a half life in the energy level and focus on the issue. But I would hope that it's been such a watershed event for our Nation that it wouldn't fade that fast.

**Q:** Let me ask you just two final questions, Sir, because I know we're running out of time. How would you fit this . . . you graduated from the Academy during Vietnam; the height of Vietnam?

**VADM Collins:** Yes, '68.

**Q:** Is there any comparison between this world and that world that you take in your analyses?

**VADM Collins:** I think certainly it's demanding; both were very demanding environments, but this one has a much different character. You know this was an incident in our homeland. We've never had an attack like that from a foreign entity in our homeland and I think that makes for a very different character.



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**Q:** Do you think that gives us a, for lack of a better word, a moral authority in pursuing this global war that we didn't have in Vietnam?

**VADM Collins:** I think so. To take a look at how, in the two eras, and take a look at how people think of their military and fire department and police department, and emergency medical technicians, and others, now versus then.

**Q:** Well it's not just them, it's us too.

**VADM Collins:** Yes.

**Q:** One of the cutter guys told me, he said, being an old cutter guy, it's strange, because the fishermen don't want to see us. We're always checking or enforcing some rule they don't want to follow, and all of a sudden we were kings of New York for three months.

**VADM Collins:** Well yes. I think there's a new relevancy for military and first responders like never before, and as recognition of the value that they bring to society like never before. And I think there is a strong . . . you know one thing - as horrific as it was - the one thing it did was coalesce, I think, society in many respects. I mean you can't buy a U.S. flag anywhere hardly because they're all sold out. So that level of nationalism, patriotism, sense of what's important; an appreciation for our institutions; law enforcement and military institutions and public providers, I think is like never before. So that's vastly different then the Sixties and Seventies, vastly different. And in that respect I think our enemy has markedly underestimated sort of the sleeping giant in our resolve.

**Q:** Let me ask you one final thing. If the giant starts to sleep again, have you thought through strategies of how you will present what we need; what the Service might need to Congress if those requests don't meet expectations?

**VADM Collins:** You know, again we . . . I'd like to define . . . one of the purposes of defining Maritime Security broadly, and I think if properly, it's probably defined broadly, is that it's not just stopping one of these terrorists coming in. It's stopping things that are not allowed to come into our country from coming in or present a danger to our country, or have an issue of sovereignty associated with them. Such as drugs. Counter-drug operations are a part of Homeland Security as far as I'm concerned.

**Q:** That's the question I was getting at. That's the final thing I wanted to ask you; is at some level do you see migrant interdiction, drugs and fisheries, at some level, all Border Security issues?

**VADM Collins:** Yes, I'd say they're inherently Border Security issues and they're part of Homeland Security, and that has been a very, very strong position that we have taken with the office of Homeland Security, the National Drug Control folks, the Department of Defense, and others, that there is a strong nexus between the drug dealers and the terrorist organizations. Drugs are the cash cow for terrorist operations. So that whole functionality that





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we bring; facilitating good things coming in, stopping bad things that are not supposed to come in, is part of that security. So I think we've got to keep all of those things on the marquee. Again, keep all of those requirements visible and keep telling the story.

**Q:** Is it easier to do that now that you sort of have this umbrella of Homeland Security to put them in?

**VADM Collins:** I think so. I think there's a great deal of attention being focused on the whole concept of Homeland Security and it will continue.

**Q:** Do you see us as part of a Border Security apparatus?

**VADM Collins:** I think Transportation is the best fit for us. It's not a great time to be changing organizationally in the Transportation Security Administration; within the Department of Transportation, which is sort of now the Department of Transportation; a much more substantial security focus than ever before. That's a good fit.

**Q:** Yes.

**VADM Collins:** And terrific support from the Navy. It's a great team. I think it's a good fit for us right now. And we, about steady state, see about 25 percent of our resources going into the Homeland Security part and there's still 75 percent outside that, much of which is connected to transportation and marine systems. So that seems to be a logical fit, but that's still playing out. I mean there are people with different opinions on the Hill. Senator Lieberman has introduced legislation that would create a Cabinet level Homeland Security office and the Coast Guard is in there.

**Q:** Yes.

**VADM Collins:** And there are others that share that view and it's still been . . . you know the formal; there will be a reorganization relative to Border Security in the Federal government. The question is, who's going to be in it and where is it going to reside? And that's still being discussed. But you can probably bet a couple of paychecks that some form of reorganization is going to happen and probably at minimum, Customs and INS coming together somehow in either a separate agency or something. But those things are still playing out.

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

**VADM Collins:** Okay, good. Nice chatting with you. Good luck in putting all this together.

**Q:** Thank you Sir.

**END OF INTERVIEW**