Interview of **REAR ADMIRAL ERROLL M. BROWN**

Conducted by **WILLIAM H. THIESEN**, Interviewer

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Portsmouth, Virginia

INTERVIEWER: This is William Thiesen. I am the Atlantic Area Historian for the U.S. Coast Guard, and we're here at the Portsmouth Federal Building on April 19, 2010, at about 7:45 in the morning. We're here to do an interview with Rear Admiral Erroll Brown.

Sir, if you would, I'm going to turn it over to you. If you could spell your full name and perhaps give us a little bit of your background, starting out prior to joining the Coast Guard.

RADM BROWN: Yes. Thank you very much. My name is Erroll, E-r-r-o-l-l, Erroll Brown. My middle name is Mingo, M-i-n-g-o. I think I kept that hidden for a long time. I'm named after my grandfather. His name was Henry Mingo, so we carry that heritage on. My son's name is Aaron Mingo, M-i-n-g-o, so we've kind of made an effort to carry that heritage on.

I was born in Ocala, Florida, in 1950. We were raised in what we call the country of Ocklawaha, Florida. I moved with my mother to Tampa, Florida, and then eventually to St. Petersburg, Florida, when I was in third grade, and basically raised in St. Petersburg, Florida, up until I went to the Coast Guard Academy in 1968. So I spent a lot of my formative years there in St. Petersburg.

My mother was a schoolteacher. She taught elementary school, and my stepfather was a truck driver. My father, my biological father, my real father, worked in support in an engineering company in Daytona Beach, Florida. So we're all Floridians, born and raised.

My brother, who was born in December of 1948, was also raised with us there, and he left before I did to go off to Detroit and work in the auto manufacturing in Detroit while I was still finishing up high school.

My sister is adopted. She was born when I was 11 years old, in 1961. My mother always wanted a girl. I guess that partly accounts for my name. She was expecting me to be a girl, and she was going to name me Carroll, C-a-r-r-o-l-l. So, after all of the wives' tales about this is going to be a girl and the pink blankets and passing all of the tests and I came out as a boy, she

had to scramble at the last minute and name me, and it came out to be Erroll. So Erroll, E-r-r-o-l-l, Mingo after my grandfather, and Brown after my father.

We, from my perspective, were middle class in St. Petersburg. We lived in a house. My mother was a schoolteacher, my father was a truck driver, and like a lot of the stories they tell you about, everyone knew everyone, so I couldn't do anything without it getting back to my mother. Especially with her being a schoolteacher, it didn't give me a lot of latitude not to do well or mess up.

But I still had my share of getting in trouble, mainly because of my brother and my friends. In Florida, we were always out playing and never coming home and doing our chores and things. So those kinds of things were part of growing up in St. Petersburg.

But at the same time, there were some racial overtones. I think I felt I was sheltered from a lot of them, primarily because of my age and the community I was in and the things I did. So we didn't come face to face with a lot of direct racial tension and discrimination for a number of reasons, and frankly, part of it was you didn't go where you weren't supposed to go, you didn't do what you weren't supposed to do, and those were the rules you grew up with.

Some people might say, "Well, how could you do that?" but if that's the way you grow up, that's what you did. My father was a truck driver. When we'd go on trips to go up north, he'd schedule where we would stop. We wouldn't stay in hotels. We'd stay with friends. We wouldn't pull over to get gas unless they had rest stops that we could use and things like that. We still had the colored water fountains and things like that. People go, "How is that?" Well, that's the way it was. We played in our community, we played with our friends, and for me, life was very, very good.

In high school, I did go to an integrated high school. They had taken a number of students, and this, I didn't know at the time. This was told to me later by my mother and some other older teachers. They were looking for some students they felt might be successful. I was going to school. I was doing pretty good, okay. I liked what I was doing, and I was asked if I wanted to go to this other school. I didn't think much about it. My mother asked me and said, "If you'd like to do it, you can do it," so I said okay.

There were about five or six of us who went off to this high school. It was Dixie Hollins High School, and it was being integrated at the time. We weren't the first, but there were only a few there before us, one or two there before us. I remember when I got to be old enough to drive, I was driving all of us in my car to the school. There, we were reasonably well accepted. There were some minor issues, but in high school, you just kind of do what you have to do, and you deal with it.

I played football, and that really helped a lot. We formed some friendships there. We had some challenges and things there, but once you made the football team and you became a starter, you became accepted more in the school and things like that.

I was fortunate. On my way out of graduating in 1968, I made the Hall of Fame in Dixie Hollins High School. It's probably too old to go back and look at the yearbooks, but I was able to do that.

And I was one of the few who got an appointment to a service academy. I remember they had a big assembly, and they were talking about the students who were going off to college with scholarships and things like that, and I had the proud opportunity to stand up and say that I had been selected to go to the Coast Guard Academy, which was an interesting process, because what I got, in fact, was a three-cent postcard in the mail. You have to think back. In those days, it was a little white card, and all you had to do was kind of check some blocks and send it back.

INTERVIEWER: That was your acceptance, the postcard?

RADM BROWN: The postcard was kind of, "Are you interested in attending the Coast Guard Academy?" I mean, that was the extent of the recruiting effort.

[Laughter.]

INTERVIEWER: Really?

RADM BROWN: Right. No one came and knocked on my door and sat down and talked to me. A postcard came in the mail. I asked my stepfather about it, about military, and he had only done an obligated 2-year service in the Army, and he said he had wished he had stayed in. He thought service was a good --

INTERVIEWER: So your family was not --

RADM BROWN: Oh, we didn't have a long military tradition. My grandfather was between services, you know, between --

INTERVIEWER: Wars.

RADM BROWN: -- wars, so he didn't serve. My father did just 2 years, and so we did not have a military tradition.

INTERVIEWER: When you were in high school, was the fact that your father was an engineer --

RADM BROWN: No, he was not an engineer. My real father did support services at an engineering company.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I understand. Okay.

RADM BROWN: So he was not an engineer.

INTERVIEWER: What about your background? I guess what I was trying to get at is, did you actually apply?

RADM BROWN: No. It was a postcard. I get this postcard, and I asked my father about it. And he thinks that service is a good deal, and he wished that he had stayed. I think that most people 20 years later say, "I should have been in the military, because I could be retired by now."

[Laughter.]

RADM BROWN: So he was supportive.

I asked my mother, and that was an interesting conversation, because at the time -- and I think I've told this story before. At the time, she said, "Well, it's your choice. It's your decision." And I said, "Come on, Mom, what do you think?" and she says, "Well, I don't have to do it. You have to do it, so it is your choice." I thought that was not good advice asking my mother what should I do, and she's not telling me what I should do, but when I look back, she was very consistent about me making my own decisions. She would support me, but it would be my decision.

I told a story earlier about I was in the fourth grade. I had been promoted to the fourth grade, and I came home, and I had some homework. I asked my mother to help me with the homework, and she said she couldn't help me, because she only knew third grade. She was a third grade teacher, and I believed her. But that was her way of passing responsibility on to me for me to learn. The same way when I was making the choice about not only the Coast Guard Academy but other places that had sent -- you know, I was applying for college, and places had sent me applications, and I was trying to decide. She was consistent about saying, "It's your decision. It's your choice."

Interestingly, later on, that came back to be relevant, because I had an opportunity as I went through the Coast Guard and talked with a lot of others and had an opportunity to serve at the Coast Guard Academy. There were, in fact, students at the Academy who were there because their parents thought it would be a good idea, and people in the service were in the service for reasons other than they wanted to be there. What they found themselves facing, extremely difficult challenges, and they needed to turn to themselves to develop the fortitude to go through what it was and be there for reasons that they wanted to be there.

I remember being on a ship standing between two diesel engines bigger than myself on the way down to the Antarctic. It was hot and sweaty, and the ship was rolling, and I was all over the place. I'm asking myself, "Why am I here?" and the answer came, "Because this is what I wanted to do." And it was what I wanted to do, and I wasn't there for another reason.

So, long story short, and I know I'm all over the place, but circling back, it all makes sense. It's all knit together, and she was purposefully making sure that what I was doing were choices I was

making for my own reasons, because I was going to be the one who'd have to do it, and I was going to be the one who would have to find the motivation to get up to do what was necessary to do it.

INTERVIEWER: Let me ask you a quick question. Your career has been in engineering, basically.

RADM BROWN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: You've had engineering practically the whole time.

RADM BROWN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Schooling all in engineering, the Coast Guard Academy.

RADM BROWN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have any idea that's what you were going to do prior to entering the Coast Guard Academy?

RADM BROWN: That's kind of interesting. When I was in the eighth grade or ninth grade -- eighth grade in junior high school was an all-black junior high school, 16th Street Junior High School, and I was taking drafting, mechanical drawing. I really loved it. I mean, I just really loved it. When I went through junior high, they had separated it into what they called levels of 8-1, 8-2, up to 8-19, and 8-19 was supposedly the top performers. I really liked math. I thought it was easy. I loved to do it. So, for me, these were things I enjoyed doing.

Then, while I was taking this mechanical drawing course in junior high school, later on when I had the opportunity to go to Dixie Hollins, Dixie Hollins Voc Tech was a technical high school, which you could take a technical track if you wanted to, and they had drafting. So I said, "Yeah, I'd like to do that," because it was a continuation of what I was doing. I really liked doing that.

So I went to the Coast Guard Academy, and you had a choice between engineering and management. I chose engineering because I liked engineering and I liked math. So it's been something I've had a preference for kind of all along my entire career. Yes.

INTERVIEWER: With your Academy, what is the year you went in?

RADM BROWN: I went in 1968.

INTERVIEWER: '68? Okay. How was that experience for you?

RADM BROWN: So I get my little postcard, and what you are supposed to do is check a box and send it back. Three-cent postcard, check a box, send it back in, and you were supposed to go

to the local Coast Guard station, which was there in St. Petersburg, and take a physical. As you continued to go through these things, either you continued to be successful or you kind of were vetted out for high school scores or for your medical or physical or anything else like that.

So I just kept checking the box, and whenever they'd send something, I'd go off and do that thing. I guess I just kept kind of going in the process, and then they came back and said, "You've been accepted." So I said, "Well, okay, but I still want to look at some other places."

INTERVIEWER: Where else were you looking?

RADM BROWN: There was Florida A&M. I could always -- I could not always, but there was a junior college there that I could go to. There was Denver, and I think there were two other places. I was playing football in Dixie, Dixie Hollins High School, but reasonably, I knew I was not going to get a football scholarship, and I knew at that point, I knew my mother couldn't afford to send me to college.

I also tell a story about my mother, while we were small, would take us off to Tallahassee during the summers while she went back to school to get her master's degree. I didn't know what a master's was, but all I knew was if my mother was going to get one and she was a schoolteacher, then it was probably important, and I should try to get education, so a combination of all of those things encouraged me to go off to school.

My actual thinking at the time was since the Coast Guard Academy required you to report in first -- it was early June. It was the end of May or early June, and the others you didn't have to go in until like September, but I'd go up there and see what it was like, and if I didn't like it, I'd just leave and go to a real school.

[Laughter.]

RADM BROWN: So I went up there. This is kind of funny. It's almost like a foretext. I walked in. We got there. Frankly, the story, the inside story is we got there a little late. My father loaded our entire family, my cousins and everyone, in our station wagon, and we started driving north to visit all of our relatives. At the end of the trip, they were going to drop me off at the Coast Guard Academy.

We were in our station wagon, and we were driving north. I was sitting in the back, and frankly, I'm clueless. I did not know anything about the Coast Guard, the Coast Guard Academy. I'd just checked this box on this postcard, and I'm headed up there in the back of the station wagon with my family. I had my trunk. You know, we were supposed to pack a trunk and supposed to take so many days' worth of clothes, and so I have all of that stuff, but I don't know what I am headed for.

So we pull into the front of what's called Chase Hall, and I'm late. But we figured, hey, you know, so I get out of the car, and I'm met by -- I'm pretty sure it was Dave Rykel [ph] at the time, and he says, "Mr. Brown" --

INTERVIEWER: Who was Dave Rykel?

RADM BROWN: Dave Rykel, he was a second class cadet. He graduated and went on to have a great engineering career in the Coast Guard. We know each other very well.

So he says, "Mr. Brown, we have been expecting you," and somehow I felt very, very special. What I didn't know was that the majority of the rest of my entire class had reported in. I think we had to be there by eleven. I think I was there like 12:30, quarter to one, something like that. So they are all in. They are all being processed, and there's a short list of people that still haven't gotten in. I'm on this short list, and I didn't know that this was why I was being recognized. I thought I was special.

[Laughter.]

RADM BROWN: But that was my indoctrination into military, because eleven means eleven. It doesn't mean 12:30, 12:45, or whenever you think. So I told my mother, I blew her a kiss and told her I'd be right back. Didn't. Wasn't -- didn't come back. They took me in for processing. I didn't see my mother again or family or parents for months, and that's when the shock began, because that's the way you are processed.

INTERVIEWER: So they just were waiting there for hours?

RADM BROWN: I think when they took me down the hall, they went to the car and said, "Thank you very much. He'll be in touch with you in a couple of months," but I didn't know that. So I'm walking down the hall with a guy going -- well, to show you how naïve I was and how I truly lacked awareness and failure to do my homework, I didn't know it was all men. I thought it was like a real college.

[Laughter.]

RADM BROWN: I didn't know there were no girls, no women there. I didn't know.

So I say, "So when can we play basketball?" I'm interested in all of the social amenities, basketball, when we can eat, and things like that. It didn't take very long for the indoctrination to start with the haircuts, the uniform, the drilling, the indoctrination, and stuff like that, and I found myself quickly trying to survive, because if you didn't know the indoctrination, you didn't get to eat. If you didn't get to eat, you didn't -- you know, and so you're doing pushups, running around, and all of those kinds of things like that.

INTERVIEWER: Was that shocking to you?

RADM BROWN: Oh, this was not what I'd signed up for.

[Laughter.]

INTERVIEWER: Were you thinking about quitting?

RADM BROWN: Well, I think if you asked almost anybody who went, with a few minor exceptions, everyone hit that point where they were sitting there saying, "Wow, what have I gotten into? I'm missing home. Everybody's yelling at me. I don't seem to be able to do anything right. I don't know this stuff. I'm constantly doing pushups. I'm running around. No, I don't think this is for me."

I was a roommate with Larry Gansz, who still works over here at MLC, and we remember sitting in our room looking out the window across the river at what we thought was a women's prison, but it turned out to be military housing. Unbeknownst to me, that was going to be where I met my wife, Monica.

So we're sitting there kind of, "Woe is me. How are we going to survive all of this?" We have our flashlights. We're supposed to be in bed with the lights out. We've got our flashlights under the covers reading all of this Coast Guard indoctrination and Coast Guard history and things like this, so that we can survive the next day. I was so quickly consumed by this survival mode that the next thing I knew it, it was time for parents to come visit. My parents came back up, and I got to see them and kissed them.

INTERVIEWER: That was still that summer?

RADM BROWN: No. Actually, it was later. It was after the academic year had started.

INTERVIEWER: Did you find the rigors or all that challenging? I mean, you were an athlete in high school.

RADM BROWN: Well, the indoctrination, you had to learn stuff that to me was kind of foreign, so that part was a bit challenging.

You asked about the rigors. It was interesting because for me -- now it is probably a better perspective in looking back. I thought I did rather well in junior high school, so I was in the upper group. Then when I went to high school, I did pretty good in high school. Then I get to the Coast Guard Academy, and then the academic year starts. So you have indoctrination plus the academic year plus all of the physical stuff, and you have to be on sports teams. They have these things that you have to do, which really consume a lot of your time and are really, really challenging.

What I find out is now I'm coming face to face with others who are -- you know, I'm pretty good, I think, but there are others who were faster, stronger, smarter. That's something. I'd get into academics. You're getting calculus, and we had like 18 or 19 or 20 hours of really hard-core classes, and now I have to learn how to study, because I didn't have to study before. I didn't have to apply myself before. So I find now that this is a lot more challenging, because you've got the physical rigor, you've got the academic rigor, and then you've got the military rigor. And yeah, that was more than I had been doing before. I was probably not hitting on all cylinders before I got to the Academy.

I failed my first course. The first time I ever failed a course was there at the Coast Guard Academy, because of all of the not-good study habits, not focusing or not taking it seriously, not managing my time, not doing all of the things that were necessary to do to be successful.

INTERVIEWER: It must have been tough. I mean, this was an engineering curriculum you were starting out, I mean true engineering where you'd had some courses before.

RADM BROWN: Right. They were recruiting the top of the top, so they take the top slice. Everybody sitting in the room is coming from the top of their class, some people from huge, very, very large schools with great backgrounds and other kinds of things like that, so it was very competitive there.

INTERVIEWER: Did you start out with a class of 2- to 300 perhaps or more than that?

RADM BROWN: I think our class, I think we were 300, almost to 400.

INTERVIEWER: Then that was dwindled down?

RADM BROWN: We graduated 177.

INTERVIEWER: So that's 50 percent, right?

RADM BROWN: Right. Yes.

INTERVIEWER: So that's pretty competitive. And most of those usually are winnowed out within the first year or two, right?

RADM BROWN: Generally, by the first 2 years. The first year is the largest. The first year is a combination of a lot of things in the first year. The second year is primarily academics. You know, if you are not cutting it academically, then that's where most of the weeding occurs. Then after that, you have a higher probability of success after the second year in.

And that was pretty true for most service academies. In the '80s and the '90s, the Congress made an effort to turn that around. They felt that 50-percent attrition was not a good model. It was not

a good use of the taxpayers' money, and they made a strong push to create mechanisms that had better success, so that was an interesting kind of a shift.

Part of the academy culture -- and that wasn't just unique to the Coast Guard Academy. Part of academy culture was to cull. You know, it was to force pressure: "Let's see how many people we can get out, and the strong survive." So there was a lot of that. Some people call it "hazing." Some people call it "indoctrination." It was something that you as a cadet had to get through if you wanted to stay there.

So I'm asked sometimes about, "Hey, what about the racial overtones?" Well, when you have that mixed in with all of the other things that upper class were able to do to you, with few recourses on your part, it just came with the territory. You just had to do what you had to do to get through and survive. This is where the Bill Pickrum story comes in.

INTERVIEWER: Who was Bill?

RADM BROWN: He was second class cadet. He was black, and unbeknownst to me and a lot of others, other minorities, he was providing us a good high cover, because he was not going to let his classmates get out of hand in terms of dealing with any of the minorities. There were things they could do and things they shouldn't do, and we didn't know that Bill was helping us out there behind the scenes by policing his own classmates.

We had exchanges and conversations, and things happened, but it was a time and it was the era and it was part of what was going on, not only there but other places.

INTERVIEWER: What about mentors, highlights of your experiences there, overall opinion of your experience academically, or just the training generally at the Academy for you in particular?

RADM BROWN: I thought it was great. At the time, it seemed onerous and the why, but in retrospect, it was a necessary character infusion. Integrity, extra effort, no excuses, mission focus, and those are traits that have held me in good stead and I think created the enduring culture of the Coast Guard.

I think you probably have witnessed in working with Coast Guard officers and enlisted that they have a clear military focus, tend to get things done, and I think all of that's part of the culture, you know, core values. Honesty, respect, devotion to duty, all of those are a part of what's inculcated and a part of the process, and I buy into it. It works. I've gone to other academies and watched their processes, and I think that military and military members are highly honorable as a result of those type of character traits.

INTERVIEWER: Any mentors, any professors, coaches, trainers, instructors that stand out in your mind, or any other students, upper classmen or whatever, that helped you along?

RADM BROWN: Generally, it was the upper class' responsibility to indoctrinate the lower class. There wasn't a lot of bonding that went on vertically.

INTERVIEWER: It's generally by class?

RADM BROWN: It's generally by class, and a lot of your classmates were your competitors and your supporters and very athletic, very smart, and so they were there to, for me, raise the bar to show you what was possible and what was necessary to be successful. And it created a lot of really lifelong friends. Everyone I went to school with now continues to be a very lifelong friend, all 177 of them that I graduated with.

INTERVIEWER: We were just talking about any influential figures that might have -- but I think that you indicated, at least from a cadet standpoint, maybe not.

RADM BROWN: Well, like I said, at the time when we were just getting there, Bill Pickrum was there. I knew of him. I was not in his company, but later on, it became very evident to me that while we weren't -- it's called "fraternizing." We're not supposed to fraternize with the upper class. So there wouldn't be what you would call that natural mentor role where you had an opportunity to have a lot of exchanges.

Later on, when we got to be a bit more senior, it became evident to me that he was flying high cover for us and was a large reason the majority of us were able to be successful and get through the Academy. But it required our own effort. There was nothing that was changed for us. As a matter of fact, it was a bit more challenging for us, but there were none of the standards or requirements or academic or athletic or professional performance or anything that changed for us.

INTERVIEWER: I guess Captain -- or was it Captain or Commander Wilks at that point?

RADM BROWN: I'm pretty sure it was commander.

INTERVIEWER: Commander Wilks.

RADM BROWN: Bobby Wilks.

INTERVIEWER: Bobby Wilks. Could you talk a little bit about that? I guess he stopped and talked with the cadets.

RADM BROWN: Right, yeah. So we're there at the Academy, and they asked all of the black cadets to meet. It came over as a PA announcement, and it basically said, "At 1930, all black cadets are to assemble in Roland Hall in the upper room at 1930," and that was the way the announcement was, being a typical military. That's what the announcement was, and that's what you do.

So we went to this room, and there were not a lot of us at that point. Like I said, a couple of handful, which kind of speaks to the fact that the numbers, when you look across a Coast Guard Academy of over a thousand people, when you muster all of the black cadets and you get them all in one small room, there was just a couple handfuls of us at the time.

So we were kind of talking amongst ourselves, and in walks this black officer, who has got his khaki uniform on. And he's got these gold wings on and these ribbons and these big stripes. For us at that level, to give you a perspective, the number-two person at the Coast Guard Academy -- well, the number-one person was an admiral. The number-two person was a captain at the Academy, and the number-three person was a commander, and he was the assistant commandant of cadets, and he was the person that you ended up going to whenever you got in deep trouble. So that was the last person you'd want to see.

And so, from our perspective, having little indoctrination about the service where commanders were next to gods and these people were high up, to see this black commander walk in, it was just like, "Wow! Who is this person?" Then he began to talk to us about his expectations for us as black future officers and also how he expected us to conduct ourselves, because it was no longer only about us, that we would represent larger issues, and so that we had to conduct ourselves with integrity at all times.

There would be effectively no place for us to hide, and we'd always be visible, we'd always be under the microscope, and we'd have responsibilities that we'd have to carry out. We wouldn't be given any special consideration. We'd have to be competent, we'd have to be prepared, we'd have to be knowledgeable, we'd have to be very good at what we do, we'd have to take care of our people, we'd have to build trust, we'd have to treat them with respect, and so he made very clear to us his expectations for us as we became the officers, and that the time to start was right here and right now. For me, that was a pretty life-changing experience, especially coming from someone who was a commander talking to us, and he was also a black officer, so it was a life-changing experience for me.

My grades got better. I got more serious about the Academy and about the service. I made the Superintendent's List, which was where you got a gold star for your academic performance, and you'd get a star for your conduct, which means you did very, very well in your adaptability polls, what other people thought about you. And also, I scored in the top percentage on the physical athletic test. So that's about as high as you can get, to get on the Sup's List, and I did that after the experience with Bobby Wilks. For me, it carried through my entire career.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think it had a similar effect on some of your fellow cadets there?

RADM BROWN: I believe so, because we'd all talk with each other about that afterwards. Interestingly, whenever we got a chance and someone wasn't doing quite what they should have been doing, we would among ourselves tell them, "Hey, don't forget what Commander Wilks said. It's not just you. It's all of us." For some, it worked, and for some, it -- for most of those people, they ended up deciding to leave, but I think it had a permanent and lasting effect.

INTERVIEWER: What was he like? Did you meet him later on in your career?

RADM BROWN: No.

INTERVIEWER: That was the only time you ever met him?

RADM BROWN: That was it.

INTERVIEWER: Was he stern?

RADM BROWN: No. Very affable, very approachable, made us feel very comfortable. Like I said, when he walked in, we were there first and were just kind of talking. Generally speaking, you're cadets, and when anyone senior enters the room, you snap to attention, and you become rigid. But when he walked in, of course, as commander, we all snapped to attention, and "Yes, sir. No, sir," and all kind of braced, and he says, "Relax, relax." He introduced himself and talked about himself and really began to make us feel comfortable. He left an impression that he was there for us. He wasn't there for himself; he was really there for us.

And he asked us, he said, "Is there anything you want to talk about?" and a few people spoke up and started to let him know how challenging they thought the Academy was and unfair. He didn't say no, but what he said was, "It is challenging, and you can do it." So, for me, it was a very consistent message, and he was affable and really made you feel comfortable and believe that you could do this.

INTERVIEWER: So you finished up in '71?

RADM BROWN: '72. Graduated in '72. Went on an icebreaker. The reason I chose the icebreaker was because I was in a naval engineering track, and my instructor, George Vance, had said, "If you're serious about engineering, you'll go on a large ship." So it was either going to be an icebreaker or a 378, which were new at the time. So I elected to go on an icebreaker, because it would get us off for a very, very long time. It was a large, complex engineering plant, and it would give me an opportunity to focus.

It was interesting because my wife -- a lot of people were getting married right at graduation. I had been dating my wife through the Academy. She was a student at Connecticut College, and we didn't have one of the June weddings, because I thought I needed to figure out what this Coast Guard thing was about and do that right.

She wasn't happy about my choice. We did eventually get married, and things seem to have worked out because we're still married, but at that time for me it was, "I'm going to go in the Coast Guard. I'm going to be an engineer, and I need to figure out what this is and how to do it right." So I went on an icebreaker, got to see the Arctic.

INTERVIEWER: Which one was it?

RADM BROWN: It was the Burton Island. It's become razor blades since then. 283 Wind Class.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, so it was a former Navy -- oh, it was a Wind Class?

RADM BROWN: It was a Wind Class. Yeah, Northwind, Eastwind, Westwind.

INTERVIEWER: Did they have four diesels?

RADM BROWN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: They were what, 278s? What kind were they?

RADM BROWN: They were the Fairbanks Morse.

INTERVIEWER: So they must have been easier to handle.

RADM BROWN: 38 and 38. Yeah, opposed to piston diesel. Yeah, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: What did you think about that?

RADM BROWN: It was everything I wanted and more. It had three engine rooms. It was just engineering all over the place. So you had that, you had the auxiliary systems. It was just -- I loved it. I'd taken engineering, and we had the math and the theories, but now we were on the maintenance and the mechanical part. It had the great chiefs and warrant officers and enlisted people. I just really reveled in it. I like that kind of stuff.

INTERVIEWER: Why? Does it go back to your childhood?

RADM BROWN: I think because wanting to know how things worked, how do things work and how do you fix stuff. So that was it for me, the engineering.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel like that experience kind of solidified your thoughts about the Coast Guard and the program you'd just been through?

RADM BROWN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: It kind of confirmed your beliefs?

RADM BROWN: Yes. Yes. Because when I was going through the Academy, there were a lot of different things. There were some courses I took, like philosophy that I didn't think everyone could have -- I figured there was always a right answer and not everyone's opinion, and so for

me, sometimes when I read some of the stories, I missed some of the undertones, but in the math side, this was the right answer. You put a box around it, and everybody got it. I think I liked the precision of it. I liked the challenges of it, to follow on to the mechanics of how things worked, the theories of hydraulics, and then watching it work, and when it doesn't work, what do you have to do to fix it. So, for me, all of those things were reinforcing.

INTERVIEWER: So you were on board the --

RADM BROWN: Burton Island.

INTERVIEWER: How many years?

RADM BROWN: I was on Burton Island for like 2-1/2 years, and then after that I went to the district office. At that time, there was the 11th District Office in Long Beach, California. I went there, and I think it was Commander Jones who was the naval engineer. I was there with two warrant officers. One was a gunner's mate, and the other was boatswain's mate. I call it the "iron fist" and the "velvet glove." The iron fist was Tetro [ph]. He was really --

INTERVIEWER: Warrant officer?

RADM BROWN: Warrant officer, and he was every experience you ever had about kind of a hard nose, do it this way, you've got to get the right answer, you don't know this, here's the history behind it kind of guy.

Another was Gunner Salem [ph], who was very affable, velvet glove, telling you, "Well, okay, I know what Tetro is saying, but what he is telling you is you need to do your homework, you weren't prepared," and things like that.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, so good cop, bad cop?

RADM BROWN: Yeah. So you'd see the same reinforcing messages. The message from Wilks was you have to be prepared. The message from the Coast Guard Academy is you have to be prepared. The message from Tetro and Salem is you have to be prepared. You need to learn this stuff. If you don't know, you need to put in extra effort to find it out. People are relying on you to know your job, and to be competent, you have to do this.

It was a very good experience. You had a lot of responsibility for, at the time it was BOSDET -- Boating Safety Detachment. That's when they had these high-speed boats, and we had to create a program for not only buying them but maintaining them. The Coast Guard was doing something different in going out and getting these racing boats to not only do their jobs but also to help with recruiting and other things like that. It was an interesting and challenging time there.

At the same time, you talked about mentoring, Captain -- he was a commander. Commander Jones asked me about what did I want to do in the Coast Guard and that I should think about it and make some decisions in advance. I had only been in going on my third year. I'm a lieutenant, JG, a lieutenant, and I'm figuring I'm going to do 5 years and get out.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, really?

RADM BROWN: I think most people have kind of a short -- you know, at the Academy, everybody is "we're going to get out."

I loved what I was doing, and I honestly hadn't decided one way or another, stay in or get out. I loved where I'd been, I loved the ship, and I liked the job I was in. And then he talked about thinking longer term, and he started talking about some of the potential jobs you'd have, and he said, "You could have my job, in charge of all engineering." I thought that was great. You know, it was kind of like the king. It shows that you know a lot, and you're responsible for a lot, and I could work my way up to his job. And he talked about some of the steps to get there, and one was grad school. So I had an opportunity to go to grad school.

INTERVIEWER: What year was this?

RADM BROWN: This was '77.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. So you had already been in 5 years outside of the Academy?

RADM BROWN: I was in the district office to '75, so I was at about the 3-year point when I had an opportunity to go to graduate school. I elected to take that opportunity to go to grad school, because it was more education. I wanted to find out more, learn more about engineering. So I went off to the University of Michigan. That's where I got two degrees, in Michigan.

INTERVIEWER: So you got two degrees in 2 years?

RADM BROWN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And what kind of degrees were they?

RADM BROWN: Naval architecture and marine engineering and industrial and operations engineering at the University of Michigan. What I learned at the University of Michigan was how much I didn't know about engineering. I remember the day I graduated and all of the courses I was not able to take and how challenging a lot of the courses I did take were. You know, it was a very humbling experience to go there, to the University of Michigan and see other graduate students.

There were also some international students, and there were some people who were working on their PhDs, and just such a rich, rich engineering environment, which just reminded me that no

matter how far you've come and how much you think you have achieved, there is always somebody out there. You know, you hear this recurring theme: faster, stronger, smarter.

[Laughter.]

RADM BROWN: And if you're going to compete, you've got to get faster, stronger, smarter. I spent a lot of late nights at the University of Michigan.

INTERVIEWER: Why did you choose Michigan over other --

RADM BROWN: They had a number of places, and that was one of the places where the program was. It was a Coast Guard program, and I have to say that a great program, they paid your tuition. You were a full-time student, so it was just great. It was huge.

INTERVIEWER: So your wife is kind of jumping along with you on these different assignments?

RADM BROWN: She was going along with me, and I'm glad she was with me there at the school, because I'm not sure I could have made it without her. She was absolutely phenomenal support.

And the good thing was when we were out of class and off, we had a chance to just kind of be young college kids and do things that young people do, and that was a lot of fun. But it turned out for us to be, because I was on a dual program, dual master's program, year-round -- you know, even though the school ended in the summer, I had to take summer courses for both of these programs. You only were required to get one degree, so I could have elected to just get the one degree, but I elected to get two degrees, which was twice the workload, twice the time, so went for it.

INTERVIEWER: Just before we move on, any people that -- you said this Captain Jones sounds like he was rather influential perhaps in guiding your career.

RADM BROWN: Yes, yes.

INTERVIEWER: I was also wondering, on the Burton Island, did you have any officers on board or enlisted people?

RADM BROWN: Probably on the ship, probably the engineering officer, Snyder. We called him "Duke Snyder." He was an engineer officer. It was my first time seeing what an engineer officer was, because for me, it was kind of an aspiration to move up in engineering as far as I could, and one of the goals is to be an engineer on a ship. So to see him and watch how he did his work -- and I was the auxiliary officer responsible for the boiler and the evap, and we were having a lot of difficulty with it. To be honest with you, at that time in that moment, I never realized how critical it was, but if you think about an icebreaker in the middle of nowhere, it's

like a city, and without water, it's pretty critical. It was my responsibility with the auxiliary gang and the chiefs, and we had some huge challenges. We were able to work our way through them.

Duke Snyder never lost his confidence in me. I got a lot of good support from not only our auxiliary chiefs but other chiefs who pitched in to help us get that problem solved. It was a pretty deep technical problem, but that way, it was a combination what you knew from engineering education, what these guys knew from their work as mechanics, and then their ability to bring in other innovative solutions that we could solve and fix the problem ourselves there at sea. It just steeped me more in the engineering culture and made me want to be an engineer even more.

INTERVIEWER: Didn't you ever feel you kind of miss being out on deck?

RADM BROWN: Oh, okay. So I'm on the ship, and part of what you have to do is you have to qualify both on the deck. You have to qualify as a deck watch officer. I remember all of my deck watch officer watches on the bridge, in the weather, and the ship rolling all over the place, and saying to myself, "You know, I'd rather be down in the warm engine room."

INTERVIEWER: Really?

RADM BROWN: Yeah. So it just reinforced that I didn't want to be a deck watch officer. I really wanted to be an engineer.

INTERVIEWER: Was it interesting, though, doing the Antarctic? You were in the Antarctic, right?

RADM BROWN: Yes, yes.

INTERVIEWER: I guess that was the first time you had been down there?

RADM BROWN: Oh, yes. It was so different. It's just white forever. They have a lot of National Geographic things now. You can do a lot on Google, but the experience is just -- the quiet, the painful cold, it's hard to describe. It was great. It was really, really great.

There was a radioman chief E-8 on there who spent a lot of time talking to me while I was there. We didn't have COMs like they have now, and you'd do a lot of the phone patches, so you'd have to line up in the middle of the night. You stand in this long line, and they had the ham radio operators, and maybe you were able to get through and make the call, and maybe you weren't.

I remember calling my wife, Monica, at the time. Sometimes she was there, and when she wasn't, it hurt, and everybody really gave you a hard time about it. You only got mail when you were able to get mail, so you'd have all of your letters all stacked up. So you'd sort them to put them in order, and you read them all in order and things like that.

I think it was probably best for me, because it got me out there, separated. I was able to focus and really get into engineering. It was a great crew, great mission, something I'd never done before. Being from Florida, I didn't think I'd ever be able to go to the Arctic or Antarctic and survive, but it was probably the opposite of everything I'd ever done in my life.

INTERVIEWER: I'm jumping back to you are finishing up graduate school at the University of Michigan's program there. Where did you go from there?

RADM BROWN: So, from Michigan, I went to Coast Guard Headquarters, and I was in the Small Boat Branch of Naval Engineering, E9. At the time, there was Butch Minson, there was Terry Sinclair, and Dr. Browning. The reason I name these people -- and there were a number of others, but John Manion who was a warrant officer, Ted Burton who has become a close personal friend, he was a warrant officer, too. The reason I name these people is because they had significant influence on my life.

Butch Minson, again, was an iron-fist kind of, "You've got to know this stuff. You've got to do it right." Very smart, he was an MIT graduate. I'd been through Michigan, and I'm coming out of school thinking I knew all of this, and I come to work for Butch Minson, and I'm going, "Gees, how does this guy know all of this stuff?"

INTERVIEWER: MIT and Michigan are two of the best programs in the country in those two fields.

RADM BROWN: Yes.

And so Butch Minson really puts you under the thumb, and it is really about being precise and knowing what you are doing. And if you don't know how to find the answer -- because you are the Coast Guard's engineering institution here. This is where the technical knowledge resides in the Coast Guard, and this is your responsibility. You have the civilians over there, and you are part of the military element. You need to know this stuff. You didn't just go to school to have fun; you went to school to learn this stuff. And so Butch Minson was kind of that iron glove.

Terry Sinclair came in, and he was a more broad, you know, where are we going with the program, how can we progress, what things can we bring in to integrate it with, and so that's what I picked up from Terry.

From Ted Burton, he was a black warrant, which was pretty rare, because that meant he had worked his way up through the ranks. As a warrant, you have a lot of autonomy and a lot of service respect, and we had this program where we were building ships. I see you have one of the 47-footers up there, which are the rollover boats. Well, he was responsible for the 30-foot SRB, which was one of the predecessors of that. That was a rollover boat.

INTERVIEWER: That was a fiberglass.

RADM BROWN: Fiberglass, yes. So now you're beginning to understand, we're going to design these boats, and we're going to test them and make sure that they do what they are supposed to. Then we are going to put them on the surf where people are going to go save lives.

INTERVIEWER: So that was designed in-house?

RADM BROWN: Right, right. It was designed in-house, and it was built out in California. That and the 32-foot Ports and Waterways boat, which was a predecessor, not for this, but the SRB was a predecessor for this.

INTERVIEWER: For the 47, yeah.

RADM BROWN: Yeah, for the 47. And they had the 44s.

Anyway, long story short, that's the essence of it. You were sent to school to learn this, and you needed to know it, and you needed to know it extraordinarily well, because what you are going to be asked to do is going to be responsible for all of the things that go on from this, the engineering, the lives that depend on it, and stuff like that. So all of these things are reinforced in terms of the Academy culture, the integrity, having to do more. You know, there's always a higher level of performance and capability. You need to step up to it and those kinds of things.

So Ted Burton was the resident inspection officer. He was the person on the scene, and I was the person back at Coast Guard Headquarters. Whenever we'd have difficulties, he'd call me. I'd fly out, or he would solve the problem. He was the technical rep with the company that was building the boat. So he and I have had a lifetime relationship. He came to all of my changes of commands and when I became an admiral, so Ted Burton and I are just close personal friends. He taught me what it was like to be an officer, because there is a difference being an officer and being enlisted and being technically competent, being savvy in a contract, how to represent the service with the commercial industry, so he was just a mentor beyond mentors.

INTERVIEWER: So you were in Headquarters during this period. Did you also go to Curtis Bay to deal with the construction situation there, or was it all contracted?

RADM BROWN: Well, that was interesting. At the time, they were building the UTB, the 41-footer. That was being carried out by someone else. Tarjahull [ph] and Manion [ph] were doing the yard's construction.

We would go up there. There were aluminum boats, but we were doing the fiberglass. We did somewhat different aluminum boats for the A and B, 55-foot Ace navigation boats, and that was a project that had a lot of challenges to it. It wasn't the same company. It was a different company. When we did the first ones, they were very successful. Then they re-competed it, and there was one by another contractor down in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, and it had some huge, huge challenges. The company had never done anything like that before, and it was very interesting.

So I didn't have a lot of Curtis Bay experience, because we were building them in different yards, but the yard did have a line going on at the time, yes. The UTB switch is just being replaced now.

INTERVIEWER: So how long did your --

RADM BROWN: I was 4 years in Coast Guard Headquarters, '77 to '81.

INTERVIEWER: Any other challenges or interesting stories?

RADM BROWN: Well, probably, the one was we had these aluminum boats being built by a shipyard in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, and the contract was not going very well. We had met with our lawyers and the contracting officers, and we made the decision to terminate for the convenience of the government, because they weren't meeting their requirements. It was my job as the project officer to fly down there and issue the stop work order, collect all of the Coast Guard materials, and so --

[Laughter.]

INTERVIEWER: It must have been tough.

RADM BROWN: Oh, you're talking about -- so I'm flying down there, and it's on a Saturday. You can't fly to Muscle Shoals. You have to fly someplace else. So I flew to the airport and got a car.

INTERVIEWER: Is it near Mobile?

RADM BROWN: I think so.

INTERVIEWER: I've heard of it, but I've never been.

RADM BROWN: So I fly to -- I rent a car, and the only car they have is this big Lincoln. So I'm a black man in a Lincoln driving through the rolling hills on my way to Muscle Shoals, Alabama, and I find myself at the top of this hill. I look down, because you can see for a long way, I look down at the bottom of the hill, and there is this intersection. At the intersection, there are Clansmen in their garb collecting contributions. So then all of a sudden, I'm sitting here feeling not very protected by the Federal arm.

[Laughter.]

RADM BROWN: I'm saying to myself, "Wow! I have a few options here. I can turn around. I can drive like heck. I can pray for a green light, or I can dig in my pocket and make a contribution."

INTERVIEWER: Wow!

RADM BROWN: So this was kind of a "Welcome to Alabama."

INTERVIEWER: And plus, after you went through that, you wound up having to stop work.

RADM BROWN: Well, beyond that.

INTERVIEWER: What happened?

RADM BROWN: Well, I'm here today, so --

[Laughter.]

INTERVIEWER: Did you give any contributions or what?

RADM BROWN: You know, as it really turned out, I got lucky. The light was green, and I just drove. I just kept driving straight through.

INTERVIEWER: I had to know. I'm sorry. You set it up, so I had to ask.

RADM BROWN: So I'm now down there, supposed to meet with our people, the attorney and also the marshal and others. So now it's Sunday, and I'm with the marshal, and I'm meeting with the marshal, and we're kind of out in -- because this place is not exactly out in the field, but it's kind of out in the field. It's an aluminum -- they do maybe like houseboats and things like that. This area's been cleared, and they have some buildings where they do houseboats, but nothing on the scale of what's really necessary for military boats in terms of the welding and a bunch of other stuff.

We've given them engines and other stuff like that, so we have property there. And so I'm with the marshal, and we're talking about how do we do this, how do we go there and secure the government property and have them stop working, keep them from destroying the property and stuff like that. So we're talking about it, and we're out in the field. He kind of turns to me, and he says, "Well, you know, I have to live here." I didn't know where he was going with this, but the essence of it was, "Hey, maybe you get on a plane and fly down here in your uniform and you say these kinds of things and you get up and you leave," but he's got to live here, and it's not quite like that down here, is what he's saying to me.

This was not only about -- it wasn't about being black. It was about not being from there, but being black didn't help.

[Laughter.]

RADM BROWN: You know, you are going to fly down here, and you're going to walk into this place and close it down.

What we did do was the next day we went into the office, and I took him with me, and the guy got ugly, got irate, threw us off his property. What we had already determined that we were going to do was at this point we weren't going to, my words, kind of really press the issue of bringing in more marshals, getting the property, getting the trucks and things out of there. So what ended up happening was we left and made arrangements to come back and meet with him later. He called his lawyers, and we called our lawyers, and we had to go to trial. It really got rather, rather ugly.

But I will never forget my trip down to Muscle Shoals, Alabama, thinking about what it's like to be a black man, what it's like to be out, what I will call, from under the skirt of the military uniform in the Federal Government, because standing out there in the fields with the marshal, it was very clear that I didn't have all of the authority and support that I thought I did. And it was Saturday and Sunday, and there is nobody to call back at Coast Guard Headquarters and go, "I'm standing in the field, and I'm not getting the support I think I need to get. What do I do?" But, again, I was given the responsibility to do this, and I had to find a way to do it. And we did, and we did get it done.

INTERVIEWER: Very interesting. So, any other experiences? You were there until -- what would that be?

RADM BROWN: '81.

INTERVIEWER: '81. What was your next assignment after this?

RADM BROWN: From '81 to '83, I went on board the Coast Guard Cutter Jarvis, and I was EO. To me, that was a pinnacle, because I always wanted to be an engineering officer on the Coast Guard's most complex naval engineering plant. There were turbines, diesel gas turbines, and for me, that was the it. You know, it was kind of like --

INTERVIEWER: Two different kinds of power.

RADM BROWN: Yeah, CODOG. CODAG, combined diesel and gas or diesel or gas, CODOG/CODAG. So we could run diesel, we could run turbines. They were pretty, at the time, elite ships of the fleet. Right now you hear the unfortunate stories about the maintenance on them, but for me, that was a pinnacle. It really was.

That was what you worked to be was an engineer officer. You know, you are kind of the guy. If it's an engineering problem, you and your people are the ones that are there to solve it. So it's kind of like Duke Snyder coming around again.

INTERVIEWER: Was that your favorite? Over your career, the favorite tour?

RADM BROWN: Unfortunately, every tour was my favorite tour.

INTERVIEWER: But working with the actual engines, did you actually enjoy the office where you were working?

RADM BROWN: I enjoyed the challenge of knowing that we were responsible for everything on that ship. On that ship, we had a very major engineering casualty where we lost one of the diesel engines, and for an EO, that's probably as low as you can go.

I felt at that point that it was the end of my career, and there was a chief candidate who I remember standing on the flight deck and saying, "Well, Chief, it's been great," and he goes, "Well, you never know how things turn out."

For him, it was, "We have to do what we have to do. Let's get this fixed and get this ship going again." He was really uplifting. And we did, we got it repaired. I guess I did a lot of other things right in my career, because I did extraordinarily well. But when that diesel engine had to be taken off, because that's a rare thing to pull a diesel engine off of a ship to get it repaired --

INTERVIEWER: Why? Did you actually take out of a soft patch?

RADM BROWN: Yeah, on the side and pull it out.

INTERVIEWER: Cut a side of the hull out and pull it out?

RADM BROWN: Right, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Wow!

RADM BROWN: Yeah. So we did it, got it back in, and I guess the rest of my career turned out to be extraordinarily well. But that, for me, I thought was a really, really low point, because I felt as though I'd failed. The chief was not focused on that. He was focused on what it was we needed to get done and helped uplift me and carry me through that period.

INTERVIEWER: It sounds like it was a really important experience.

RADM BROWN: It was, it was. It really was.

INTERVIEWER: The gas turbines, are those really difficult to do? I know they are a very high-pitched performance.

RADM BROWN: Yeah. Diesels are very forgiving. You know, the lube oil with diesel, it's very, very forgiving. The turbines are not as forgiving. The day tanks have to be up, and the

clearances, and the hot wash and all of those things. It's high maintenance. It's high output, but a lot of care, a lot of care. So that's '81 to '83.

'83 to '87, I'm in Honolulu, Hawaii, and I get a phone call from Dr. Boggs. Boggs was one of the instructors who was at the Academy when I was a student at the Academy, so for Dr. Boggs to be calling me, you know, it's like a professor. He goes, "What do you think about being an instructor at the Coast Guard Academy?" and I felt as though, gees, I've had humbling experiences throughout my entire life. I've gotten knocked down at the Academy as a student by the rigor of the courses and the competition of my classmates. I go on to the University of Michigan and was really humbled again with the graduate students and the graduate work. And then he says, "Do you want to be an instructor?" and I'm kind of going like, "Gees, are you sure you're calling the right guy?" He says, "Well, think about it."

So I asked my wife about it. I said, "Hey, I'm here in Hawaii. I can go over here to the district office. I know the ship. I know the area. They want me to go there. I think I'd like to go." She said, "We said we are leaving here May of '83. I am leaving May of '83." So I go, "Yeah, I think I would like to be an instructor at the Coast Guard Academy," so we went back to Connecticut.

INTERVIEWER: That was Jarvis?

RADM BROWN: I was off Jarvis, yeah. So I went to the Coast Guard Academy, and I loved it. You know, if you are talking about someone who felt as though they were in their element, I felt as though I was in my element at the Coast Guard Academy. I loved teaching. I always thought I'd be a -- in the back of my mind, I wanted to be a teacher.

It was a very humbling experience. I thought I was pretty good. They have to do critiques on you, and they do videos and stuff. I get my critiques back, and they would say things like, "Explains things in a confusing manner." Part of it is their chance to get back at you, but to read these kinds of critiques, they would bring you down a notch, because you had to staple them with your evaluations and send them in. You couldn't do anything about them. You just had to staple all of those critiques and send them in.

Just the fear that a student is going to ask you a question that you don't know the answer to, you know, you open a book, and all of the answers weren't in the back of the book, but you were responsible for them. I really learned engineering there, thermodynamics, fluids. And Doc Gathey [ph] was a co-teacher, and that really helped a lot. He was another professor I had when I went through there.

So it's just something else to be -- having been taught by someone who you idolize and then having an opportunity to work with them side by side. There was also an opportunity while I was there to be permanent teaching staff, and I said, "That's what I want. I want to be an instructor for the rest of my life."

INTERVIEWER: So this was probably more rewarding to you than working on engines in an engine room?

RADM BROWN: You know, I've never been asked that question. At the time when I was there, I was happy. I thought I didn't want to do anything else. Now that I'm an instructor at the Academy. I'm happy, and I don't think I want to do anything else. I was happy to do either.

But now there is a chance to be on the permanent staff. I said, "Yes, that's what I want to do." I applied for it, and I came in second. Bruce Mustang was selected. I was not selected, and I felt, again, this was the end of my career. I was crushed. I was not going to be able to go forward in our organization, but I guess I did something right after that, because I continued to move forward in my career.

INTERVIEWER: What level were you?

RADM BROWN: I was a lieutenant commander.

INTERVIEWER: A lieutenant commander at that point?

RADM BROWN: Right, yes. Probably one of my high points was we developed some new courses there. I was working with a guy named John Tuttle. He was another MIT graduate, and we were taking some of the stuff they were doing at graduate level and introducing it to our students, and they were doing well in it.

John helped craft some of these new courses, and we were taking these students, and we would compete against the other Naval ARC programs, Annapolis, MIT, Michigan, and others, and our cadets won the competition.

We have the little plaque down at the Coast Guard Academy now. I have never been so proud of anything in my life. A lot of the students are still -- well, they're getting to be seniors and graduating now. They are captains and stuff, but I have a lot of close connections with those and watching the students come in and helping them believe and understand they can do it if they apply themselves.

So these stories now come back and tell themselves over and over again, because I sat in the chairs with the instructors telling me that I could do it if only I would apply myself, and now I'm sitting as an instructor telling these students that they can do it if they apply themselves. And I'm now seeing them as captains and as successful in the organization.

INTERVIEWER: That must have been a real high moment for you.

RADM BROWN: Oh, beyond.

INTERVIEWER: What a testament for you to have them win.

RADM BROWN: Yeah, above MIT, the Naval Academy.

INTERVIEWER: Those are the top programs.

RADM BROWN: Those are.

INTERVIEWER: So are you here for 4 years?

RADM BROWN: Yeah, '87. So for '87, I go --

INTERVIEWER: Your wife, is she from Connecticut?

RADM BROWN: Yes. I met her at --

INTERVIEWER: She must have really enjoyed it.

RADM BROWN: Well, it's interesting. She is actually a Navy brat, so she's moved around a lot. That's another one of those little interesting stories.

So it's my first summer there at the Coast Guard Academy, 1968. I had met her through an introduction, and she invites me over to her house for Thanksgiving dinner. There's not enough time to go all the way back to Florida, so I'm still there at the Academy, and I don't have any place to go, and I go over to her house for Thanksgiving dinner. And I meet her father, who I didn't know at the time was an E-9 in the Navy on submarines. And he's got his buddies with him. They're all in civilian clothes, and I don't know them.

So I come in, and I'm in my uniform, and they start grilling me about being in the Coast Guard and being a cadet. Now all of these late nights under the thing with my flashlight, I'm now going to show them what I know about the military and military C services.

[Laughter.]

RADM BROWN: Those guys were just up one side and down the other, "Aren't you too short to be in the Coast Guard? Don't you need to be 6 feet? Aren't you guys only supposed to wade out so far?" I didn't know what was going on. They were just giving me --

INTERVIEWER: A what-for.

RADM BROWN: -- what-for. It turned out to be he was a huge mentor. He sent me Commander Oakley's captain's eagles and admiral stars, like years before. I'm like a JG, a lieutenant, and he sends me these gold oak leaves. So he really had faith in me far before I even had it, right up through the thing. I think I was a commander, and he sent me these stars. I'm

going, "Whoa." So I put them in a desk drawer, and I'm going, "Well, that's not going to happen."

[Laughter.]

RADM BROWN: So it's '87, and I go back, board a ship, and I'm the executive officer now. That's great, because now you've moved up, and I'm moving up. This was kind of a natural progression.

INTERVIEWER: What ship was it?

RADM BROWN: It was the -- I was XO on the Rush. XO on the Rush.

On the Rush, we have two incidents that are transformative for me. One, we have a small boat that goes over in the Bering, and people were underwater. Then the boat died. The power in the boat died. Now we have to go out there and get the boat. We have to launch another boat.

INTERVIEWER: Did they capsize?

RADM BROWN: Right, yeah. And it's the middle of the night, and it's dark. I'm there just thinking about -- we are the Coast Guard. We are the ones who go out. We are the professionals. Here we are, we have someone in the water, and we have to find him. This could turn out very tragic, but it didn't. It didn't. But I'm never going to forget that moment as long as I live.

I remember talking with the guy when he went in the water. I mean, it was very traumatic for a lot of people. It was dark. It was stormy. We had to put the boat out. We had trouble finding people. It was frightening. It was really, really frightening.

INTERVIEWER: It was a stormy Bering Sea?

RADM BROWN: Yeah, you know, it was one of those dark and stormy nights. They have this thing on now called the "Deadliest Catch," and they focus on the boats. It's real. That's what it's like out there. But we are the ones that have to go out there and board them. We are the ones who have to launch the boats and go out there, not only the small ones, but the large ones.

I remember night boarding. One of the scariest moments in my life is stepping off the boat onto the Jacob's ladder and grabbing with your hand, cold, icy water, and the boat moving out and away from under you, and you're holding on, and you have to. You now, when the boat comes back -- you have to do it. You have to experience it. TVs are great, but --

INTERVIEWER: Knowing that if you go in that water, it would be life-threatening.

RADM BROWN: Right. And it was very traumatic for a number of people having that experience.

So we were able to get all of the people, get the boat, and get all of the things on. There was no loss of life. There was a big investigation. You know, at another time in your career, you're thinking, wow, how is this going to unfold. That turned out to be a successful recovery.

Again, it was one of those engineering things. First, what happened was the small boat lost power, and then it broached in the waves. So it keeps telling you why you have to do what you have to do, and you have to be so good at it, and what you have to do is relied on by everyone.

We also had an incident where the Exxon Valdez -- we were on the ship, and it was Captain John Tozzi at the time, where they had the big spill. We were the first ones on the scene for that.

INTERVIEWER: Really?

RADM BROWN: We were providing an escort for another ship that we had seized when the call came in.

INTERVIEWER: Were you in Valdez at the time?

RADM BROWN: No, we weren't in Valdez. We were up there but not in Valdez. So we had to chop and go up there for that, and we were the first ones on the scene.

INTERVIEWER: Wow! What was that like?

RADM BROWN: Oh. Remember, I described how vast and open the whiteness was in the Antarctic. It was exactly the same as the sheen of this black gook that covered Prince Williams.

INTERVIEWER: Just the opposite?

RADM BROWN: Yeah. Prince William Sound up there. We got up in helicopters, and as far as you could see, this little, what used to be white ship now covered with oil, bouncing around in this sea of spill for as far as you could see, so Exxon Valdez and John Tozzi's ship.

INTERVIEWER: Did you launch boats, or did you try?

RADM BROWN: Again, it called for extraordinary engineering measures, because we had to make sure that our intakes -- you know, we had to shut down our evaps and stuff like that. You know, just all of the things that happen when it happens, you have to think about them on the fly right there.

So that was '87 to '89 on that ship for me, and our skipper got sick. And I had to take over our ship once when we were on turbines going through the Aleutians in high pursuit in heavy seas.

INTERVIEWER: What were you pursuing?

RADM BROWN: We had to make all best speeds because of this SAR case. A ship was aground. There was a lot of action, for lack of a better word. That was a tour of just extraordinary experiences, extraordinary challenges.

INTERVIEWER: How did that compare to your other ship experiences? Did you enjoy that? Was that exciting, or was that kind of nerve-racking?

RADM BROWN: Exciting. You know, the success and the professionalism of the people, just the ability to be able to rely on and depend upon people that do extraordinary things. I think that's why most people in the Coast Guard said, "Well, I'm not anyone special." You know, these are all extraordinary people doing ordinary things until extraordinary times come, and they rise to the occasion because of their training, their professionalism, their culture, their nature, their mission focus, and their precision, and their knowledge. These are the best of the best, and just to watch them go through and do these kinds of things without a script book on how to do it is just something else. So, for me, it was extraordinary, challenging, and rewarding.

That was '87 to '89.

INTERVIEWER: Was it 2 years?

RADM BROWN: Yeah, it was 2 years.

INTERVIEWER: They're '89 or '90 or something like that?

RADM BROWN: '87 to '89.

Then from '89 to '91, I went back to Coast Guard Headquarters, and I was in the Coast Guard Headquarters' chief of staff's office, and there, we did a lot of policy review, budget development and resources for the Coast Guard. That was probably one of my hardest jobs was to get up at like 4:10 in the morning and get home very, very late at night. It was just a very, very demanding job.

So, again, no matter how high I thought the bar was, I was the commander on a ship, and I thought I was doing a lot of stuff. Then we'd get there to what is called CP8, and to watch the work ethic of these people and demands that came on that shop and the stuff that you had to do there, the bar was again raised there.

INTERVIEWER: Did you find that at all rewarding, or was it just kind of boring?

RADM BROWN: The knowledge, the ability to see policy and see a broader perspective of the Coast Guard was very, very rewarding, to see how you have to make very, very hard tradeoffs.

A lot of times you go, "Why can't we have this?" It seems simple in isolation, but in context, it's very difficult and very challenging and what it takes to have a successful program and things like that.

INTERVIEWER: You weren't really trained in finance and economics.

RADM BROWN: Correct.

INTERVIEWER: Your training is engineering. Obviously, you have a head for numbers.

RADM BROWN: Correct.

INTERVIEWER: Did you find this difficult to deal with all of the fine aspects?

RADM BROWN: No, no, because of the orderliness of it.

INTERVIEWER: The logic.

RADM BROWN: Yeah, the logic of it, and you had to be able to prove. You had to put together a persuasive and compelling case, so the ability to if, then, logic training, build your case. So that's '89 to '91.

So I'm there at Coast Guard Headquarters, and I get this call that says, "Hey, how would you like to be the military assistant to the Secretary of Transportation?" "Why would I want to do that?" He said, "Well, it's a great job. There is a guy over there now. You come highly recommended, so take a look at it and tell us what you think."

So I called the guy who was there, and frankly, what I said to myself was "Gees, I'm getting a little old to be a bag toter" -- you know, an aide. And I said, "Sir, I'm not sure I'd be interested in it, but I will come over to talk to you."

I went over to talk to the guy, Jeff Hathaway, who subsequently became an admiral also, and Jeff Hathaway was the aide to the Secretary when they had one of the early terrorist airline crashes, you know, the explosion.

INTERVIEWER: Was that the Flight 800?

RADM BROWN: No. It will come to me later, but this is the one that really became infamous. I can't think of the name of it.

INTERVIEWER: One of the ones that crashed off the East Coast?

RADM BROWN: No. It was a bomb that went off.

But anyway, so I go over to talk to Jeff Hathaway, and he explains to me what it is that he does. It is an opportunity to work with a Cabinet-level officer at all levels, policy, on the Hill, just all over. And I said, "Yeah, I think I'd like to carry a bag to be able to do that."

[Laughter.]

RADM BROWN: So I went there. It was Secretary Skinner, and he, probably of all of the people -- you talk about if ever anyone has just given you just carte blanche, just everything, and ultimate expectations, it was Secretary Skinner.

I could do or have access to anything, but for that, anytime he called for anything, no matter how remote it was or important it was or where it was, I was the one who had to do it. It gave a unique perspective that you got that was even above the level of the commandant, so you really got to see a broad perspective of the entire Department of Transportation, not just Coast Guard, but FAA, Highways, and so it was a broad learning experience.

I guess during that time, there were a number of things that happened during that time that were of note. One, the very famous story of "The Perfect Storm" happened during that time.

INTERVIEWER: That was '91 to '93, in there somewhere?

RADM BROWN: Right, right. I was in the Secretary's office. We were having a staff meeting, and the phone rang. And he said, "I'll get a plane. I'll be there," and he says, "Erroll, take care of it."

I didn't know what was happening at the time, but what this was -- and there are tons of elements of this story. What this was, was the Air National Guard helicopter that had gone down. Do you remember?

INTERVIEWER: Right.

RADM BROWN: And you know the story. They launch an Air National Guard helicopter to do the rescue for the sailboat. It went down, and they lost --

INTERVIEWER: On the way back, it was going to refuel and couldn't get it.

RADM BROWN: Right, right. So I'm sitting in the office in the morning, and the phone rings, and he goes, "I'm getting a plane. I'll be there. Erroll, take care" -- you know, I'm sitting there. So what we had to do was make arrangements to fly out to the station, because the Secretary wanted to personally deliver.

INTERVIEWER: Was that the station for the Tamaroa?

RADM BROWN: No, it wasn't for the Tamaroa. It was the Air National Guard.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I understand. Okay.

RADM BROWN: Yeah, right. Later on when you look back, that's part of the weave of "The Perfect Storm," because things happened, people had to do things, and on and on and on.

But it just gave you a glimpse of the Secretary. You know, he dropped everything to go there to do that.

During the time I was there, they had a change of like five Secretaries. There was Skinner. Busey was the Acting Secretary when they had a change of administration. Peña came in. Secretary Card. During all of this time, I'm the person who has got to be brought in and interviewed to be kept or let go, because it's a very confidential area. The people only want their own people. They don't -- you know, know or trust. But to be able to go through all of those screenings and to be able to be retained and work for all of those people without being fired --

I remember when I got my next set of orders. I went to my wife and said -- she said, "Do you consider it to be a success?" and I go, "I didn't get fired," which people had gotten fired from those or they said, "We don't want this person because we're bringing our own."

INTERVIEWER: For no reason of their own, just because they brought their own.

RADM BROWN: Right. So while Card was there, there was Hurricane Andrew, which at the time was the largest thing until Lockerbie.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, okay. That was the terrorist attack.

RADM BROWN: That was the terrorist attack that was prior to --

INTERVIEWER: When Hathaway was --

RADM BROWN: When Hathaway was there. So we went down to Hurricane Andrew, which at the time was the largest, most devastating landfall --

INTERVIEWER: That was a super hurricane.

RADM BROWN: It was huge. It was a Category 5. It was a huge knockdown.

So I went down there, and I became the chief of staff for the Secretary, because at the time -- this was before they got the routine of getting Federal people there, and the Secretary of Transportation was the entire presence for that in the middle of a big political turnover, because the Governor of Florida was of a different party. They had this big push. You had the big standoff between the Federal Government and the State of Florida and the resources, and you're in the middle of all of that, and you have to deliver services.

They brought in the 82nd Airborne to walk around, and they got into conflicts with the locals. They had to take the arms and guns from the 82nd Airborne. It was just, the things that went on down there in Hurricane Andrew, I mean, you saw the same thing basically happen again.

INTERVIEWER: In Homestead and all of that.

RADM BROWN: Right. In the most recent hurricane, in terms of civil order -- you know, how do you retain civil order? How do you reestablish communications and all of those kinds of things? We had to do all of that. We had to create a coalition, bring people -- this was before FEMA got to the maturity it is at today. All of that basically was knitted together.

INTERVIEWER: You were kind of helping oversee that.

RADM BROWN: Beyond that, beyond that. Yeah. So that was a huge, huge learning and growing experience for me, because it was another one of those, "Okay. So you're the guy who's got to do this."

[Laughter.]

INTERVIEWER: You weren't just bag toting.

RADM BROWN: No, I was beyond bag toting. That was beyond bag toting.

INTERVIEWER: That was amazing.

RADM BROWN: So that was '93, '91 to '93.

So '93 to '94 I went to the War College.

INTERVIEWER: So just in that 2-year span you went through all of those different Secretaries?

RADM BROWN: Yes, yes.

INTERVIEWER: That's amazing. Wow!

RADM BROWN: So '93 to '94, I go to War College, and probably the most notable thing about War College was that I met all of these hyper-smart, strong -- you know, they were much more athletic, much smarter, and much stronger. So I'm at the War College now, so these are the cream of the crop from the other Naval Services who are now going to the War College up in Newport.

INTERVIEWER: But they were there for the same program you were.

RADM BROWN: Right, right. These are the people who are likely to be leaders and flags. So now I am competing with this group. Again, I am sitting around a group that is faster, smarter, stronger.

[Laughter.]

INTERVIEWER: Hard to keep up.

RADM BROWN: And so I'm asking myself, wait a minute, I'm an engineer. Why did I get selected for a war college, which is primarily operational, with a deep operational background?

INTERVIEWER: Management, I guess.

RADM BROWN: So anyway, I'm in the War College.

INTERVIEWER: What was the program?

RADM BROWN: It was National Security and Strategy. It is the services' finishing school. It's post-graduate level. It gives you a master's. Now you should be prepared to go to the highest level of executives and deal with strategy and policy and resources and things like that.

So, war, it really is about how do you fight a war. I mean, it is very serious about how you fight. This is not just an academic nice-to-know. They go all the way back to the Peloponnesian wars, so you go through all of that. I'm sitting there going, man, here I'm knowing differential calculus, and it's not helping me. I know fluid dynamics; it's not helping me. I should have been studying history and war, because these guys are eating my lunch. It was the competitiveness again, you know, the bar being raised, and you have to measure up. You have to do what it takes to be successful in this environment. You know, the opportunity is there, but the responsibility is yours to meet it, so we go through that.

Another interesting thing that was awesome about that was I also went to the international program, and they had international students from all over.

INTERVIEWER: So you are doing two different programs?

RADM BROWN: Right, right. We talk about ethnic diversity here, but until you've actually immersed yourself with international students, it was a completely different level of experience. Small things like when you go to have a briefing, we see everything that is North America-centric when they put the maps and charts up. You know what I am talking about. The boundaries are different, the terms are different, and you're kind of going, it really just broadens your horizon. What you thought was the way it is, is just the way you are familiar with. It's not the way others see the world, the way they relate. Their ethics are different. It's just so different.

It was just mind expanding. So the competition and a broadening of the international experience for me were there.

So I'm at the War College. I graduate. I finish, and I'm talking to the detail, and they said, "You're coming back as a budget officer." And I said to my wife, "I'm going back as a budget officer." She goes, "Let me see if this makes any sense. You're an engineer. You go off to a War College, and you get this super fancy degree in strategy and policy for war, and they send you back as budget. Help me understand how this" --

INTERVIEWER: What the logic is.

RADM BROWN: -- "how this knits together."

Well, while I was at the Coast Guard Academy for those 4 years as an instructor, I was also a basketball coach and did a whole bunch of other stuff. I also set about to get a master's degree in business administration. So I got a master's in business administration on my own time.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you get that?

RADM BROWN: It was at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institution, RPI. So I took on my own time while being an instructor and a coach to get my master's degree in that.

INTERVIEWER: Who were you coaching?

RADM BROWN: Basketball.

INTERVIEWER: At the Academy?

RADM BROWN: Right. Hallie Gregory.

So I get to be the budget officer for 2 years at the Coast Guard from '94 to 96, which is huge because everything funnels through the budget. I got to congressional testimony, answer questions, go to the Hill, be the person who is sitting behind the commandant. They had two people. One was the chief of budgets, and the other chief of programs. I worked in the programs office.

These people are primarily responsible to answer any question the Coast Guard commandant has. That's pretty intimidating. Any question. So he's sitting there testifying, and they say something to him, and he turns over his shoulder. Your responsibility is to whip out the answer and pass it to him.

INTERVIEWER: Who was the commandant?

RADM BROWN: At the time, the commandant was Admiral --

INTERVIEWER: Yost?

RADM BROWN: No, no, it wasn't Yost. It was Kime.

INTERVIEWER: Kime?

RADM BROWN: Kime, yeah.

So Williams was the chief of staff, and Williams took no prisoners.

[Laughter.]

RADM BROWN: The two things you never did, one -- excuse my English -- don't not know and don't be wrong. You know, don't not be right. So you have to know, and you have to be right. That's an onerous task, given the volume.

INTERVIEWER: A lot of pressure.

RADM BROWN: Yeah. So that was 2 years of yet again raising the bar. So it's '96, and from that, I go right over here to Portsmouth.

They stood up a new command, Integrated Support Command, which has now changed, but I was the CO there for --

INTERVIEWER: So you were a CO to the base here?

RADM BROWN: Right, from '96 to '98. And there, I met John Williams, who was my XO. He was a commander, he was black, and I probably learned more from John than anyone on just how to manage complexity in just the most simple, logical, amenable ways, you know, bring all of these different communities and things together. John just had this talent for just working through the middle ground of bringing groups together. John was phenomenal.

INTERVIEWER: He was your junior, though.

RADM BROWN: Yeah, he was my junior. I learned probably more from juniors than seniors. But John, he was black, and he was great, John Williams, really great.

INTERVIEWER: Was he Academy?

RADM BROWN: No, he was not Academy.

INTERVIEWER: He was an OCS guy?

RADM BROWN: He was an OCS guy. It probably made all of the difference in the world.

INTERVIEWER: How's that?

RADM BROWN: Well, you know, because kind of, I guess of the people. He'd been on both sides of it. He was more about getting it done with and through people than getting it done by direction, by orders. John was extraordinary. John was truly, truly extraordinary.

So that's '94 to '96. Then I get this phone call that I'd been selected.

INTERVIEWER: Your admiral selection?

RADM BROWN: Yes. It's like the phone rang, and my wife says, "There's a call for you," while we're eating. We were eating spaghetti. We had boxes all around the living room because I had done a GO. I had been there for a while, GO because my daughter was a senior in high school. I had taken orders to come down here and was now in the process of moving my family down.

INTERVIEWER: So they were up in D.C.

RADM BROWN: Right, right. So she had graduated high school, and we were moving everybody down, and the phone rings. Boxes in the middle and everything. The watchstander says, "Can you hold for the commandant?" About that time, I just, "Whoa! What did I do wrong now? I don't know what it was, but it's pretty bad because the commandant is calling me." And I'm running through my mind, what had I done?

And he goes, "I just wanted to congratulate you. You have been selected." I just couldn't believe it. I was stunned. I was voiceless, speechless. I was just tingling. It was one of those this-can't-be-happening kind of things. So I was selected for flag. Then I went from there to MLC.

INTERVIEWER: So you stayed in Hampton Roads area?

RADM BROWN: I stayed in Hampton Roads area, moved because of quarters into the flag quarters. Interesting time in life because now I was the boss. Before, these were my peers, and some people were senior to me, and I'd catapulted pretty significantly up the organizational chain. And I was now senior to people who were senior to me, because of having been deep selected -- you know, reached down. At the 25-year point, I was getting a call to be selected.

INTERVIEWER: That was '98 when you reached flag or star?

RADM BROWN: Right, yeah. And selected in '97. That was 25 years, and that's -- so, it was great support, but frankly, there were camps of communities who didn't think that this was the right selection, going to work. I just had to do my part. I just had to perform.

During that time, when I was at IC, it was a new organization, and we did -- with John Williams' help and others, we did some really, really creative things.

INTERVIEWER: Like what?

RADM BROWN: We created some success, bringing the organization together in elements that had not been there, putting metrics into place, giving them creative opportunities and letting them work together.

We had two pilots. I had one, and another was up in Boston. This was the same time they had the TWA 800. We weren't the direct ones, Boston was, but we floated a lot of the support to that, and this was a great demonstration of how our model was working and working well.

INTERVIEWER: So, in other words, you are flying supplies up there for that, is that what you are saying? I'm not sure I'm understanding.

RADM BROWN: Because the support that was required to support that operation extended beyond the capability of what they could provide locally, we were able to flow resources in there because we now had a broader reach and had an integrated command to be able to do that.

INTERVIEWER: A lot of it was, I guess, Long Island.

RADM BROWN: Yeah, and out of Boston. And Boston had an IC, but it still eclipsed what Boston could do. Peggy Riley was huge in that regard. She was one of my contemporaries.

So we move there. I get the job, and then I go up to MLC commander, '98 to 2000. Then we have Y2K.

INTERVIEWER: That must have been a big deal for an MLC.

RADM BROWN: Yeah, it was a huge deal.

INTERVIEWER: With all of the computer operations and whatnot.

RADM BROWN: Yeah. So I'm sitting up there in Y2K, and I'm with Dale Gabel, who is the deputy up there. I have to tell you, that was one of those cases where the team, all of the elements had pulled together all of their requirements. We had a war room that had been set up by the previous deputy there, Ron Silva, a civil engineer who had done a magnificent job of bringing visibility to all of the resources and setting up emergency communications. We had to do a lot of prep stuff, and the people did an extraordinary job.

So you were sitting there, and only the truth will tell itself at the witching hour at midnight.

INTERVIEWER: Was it really that big of a deal?

RADM BROWN: In retrospect, no, but to get prepared for it and what you were holding at risk was very, very high.

INTERVIEWER: I just remember all of the books that came out in the bookstore about Y2K and all of the money they must have made.

RADM BROWN: So it was 2000, and then Admiral Rufe, who was here, called me and said, "How would you like to be district commander?" And that was not the norm at that point. You know, I'm an engineer. I had had the ultimate engineering job as MLC commander, so now it was time to go back to headquarters and a staff job, because you have had your ticket punched, you've had your huge command, and that's kind of the way it is. And he said, "How would you like to be district commander?" and I said, "Wow! Gees, if you think I can do it." And he said, "Yeah," and I got the 13th District out in Seattle, Washington, and I was there for 3 years.

INTERVIEWER: That was 2002 to --

RADM BROWN: 2000 to 2003.

INTERVIEWER: 2003.

RADM BROWN: 2000 to 2003.

And out there, it was 9/11, and I did an oral history on the events. It was done by a reserve, Capelotti or something like that. I apologize. But I did an oral for that one, which captures from my perspective some of the highlights there.

Probably from that tour, that event was seminal for me because it really reached out and through and called upon the best of the best for the people, because in the moment in which it happened, everyone was really concerned about their people.

We were in the tallest building in Seattle, and now, of course, everyone wants to go home, but now we have to go to work. To be able to issue that order, have it carried out, respond to the Navy, and not know what the real threat was, and reorganize your forces on the fly to do that and have the people respond to that was just extraordinary. So that was probably seminal for me at that time and, again, reinforced the professionalism, the interdependency, you can't do this by yourself. We were relying on everyone else, the ladder being raised even yet again.

Then my final tour was in Coast Guard Headquarters as the chief engineer, and for me, that was really kind of the pinnacle. You start off as a student engineer, and you rise to be the number-one engineer in the entire Coast Guard. It was just humbling and rewarding. I can't find the words to describe it. It's been a storybook career.

I'm babbling far too much. I was going to try to get out of here.

INTERVIEWER: Well, actually, I've just got a couple more questions for you. 2003 to 2005, you were the chief engineer at Headquarters. Any high challenges in those 2 years?

RADM BROWN: Probably. We were in the middle of the big Deep Water challenge, where we were having the industry do a performance-based contract, and we had some real engineering challenges, which ended up, frankly, in Congress. We had challenges about, from our perspective, some of the engineering technical issues we had brought to the table about the structure of the hull that ended up going as far up as you can in terms of Congress and engineering and things like that, and we were shown to be correct about that, which, you know, is about as far and high and most you can test an engineering assessment.

We also had some huge challenges on re-engining the 65s. At that time, we had an engineering in-house aviation perspective on that, a commercial perspective. The engineering in-house prevailed. So it was just a lot of challenges of the engineering and technical expertise that take you way back to Tetro and Salem, you know, talking about the iron fist back when I was a JG, and Tetro saying, "You have to know all of this stuff."

INTERVIEWER: Oh, yeah, the two chief warrant officers. Right.

RADM BROWN: And Salem, and you just take that all the way through to when we had the challenge with the aluminum small boats, and we had to close those guys down because of their welding and other kinds of things like that. And you could walk this all the way through, through all of those engineering challenges, all the way through.

And Butch Minson, in '89, when he said you have to know this stuff, because we are doing these fiberglass boats, and they've got to roll over, and you have to go out in the surf, and just walk this thing all the way through. It's the same thing over and over and over, all the way up to the top. You have to know it. You have to be right. You have to. There is no recourse. You are the gate of last stop. There is no recourse. You have to know this stuff.

And so they are very challenging, very rewarding. Every gate was higher. Every step was higher. Everybody I met in subsequent years was faster, smarter, and stronger, and the bar kept on going up and up and up and up.

INTERVIEWER: So, having surmounted all of those challenges and cleared all of those hurdles, what do you think was the key to your success in reaching the top of your field in the Coast Guard?

RADM BROWN: It's the people around me, clearly. No one is successful by themselves. I think it goes back to when it was inculcated at the Academy in terms of the core values. While you have these unlimited opportunities, you also have the responsibility. You know, it's like my mother, it was back to, "This is your choice, and you have to do what it takes to be able to be

successful." So that was just repeated over and over and over. It's the preparation. Admiral Loy talks a lot about opportunity and intersection of opportunity and preparation, so you really have to do the work.

Michael Jordan -- I know, I am dating myself -- he differentiated himself because he was willing to do what others weren't willing to do. And I'm not saying I'm not willing to do what others aren't willing to do. I think I'm more like all of the other successful Coast Guard people who do what is necessary, who do what it takes, who do the late nights, the extra work, the extra effort, you know, getting up here at "O" Dark 30 to come out here, and you do it. And no matter how well you think you are and what you think you are doing, there is always someone out there working harder, smarter, faster, stronger.

So I'm sitting in the car getting ready to come in, and there's somebody jogging. And I'm going, well, I'm the lazy one here, because I am here very early, but there is somebody here who is earlier and out running and going to go to work. That's kind of the story. It repeats itself. There are no shortcuts. It is hard work, and you are the one who has got to be willing to put it in and do it, and it's your choice.

INTERVIEWER: I know that you really covered this so much, but I just wanted to make this clear. You graduated from the Academy, and then you got two graduate degrees from the University of Michigan, and then you got a master's in business while you were teaching and coaching at the Academy. Plus, you got an advanced degree at the Naval War College.

RADM BROWN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Did you get any other degrees?

RADM BROWN: No.

INTERVIEWER: I think that's quite a bit.

[Laughter.]

INTERVIEWER: But as far as putting in the extra time, I think you probably put in a lot more time than others.

RADM BROWN: Well, my mother emphasized learning, and so while these are the formal ones, I think if you got back, all of these opportunities were replete with growth.

You know, when I was working for the Secretary, now you're getting to see the whole Department of Transportation and not just Coast Guard. When I was at the War College, now you're getting to see international. When I went to Capstone, when I got to be selected as a flag officer, here's the top of the top. These are the flag and general officers who are smarter than smart, stronger than strong. It's just, the bar keeps being raised, and to interact with that group

and to travel internationally with them, it's just a constant broadening of knowledge and learning. It's always been the opportunity to get more and do more, but with that came more responsibilities. More was expected of you.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think there would have been any other choice but to go into an engineering-related field starting out, I mean as far as your aptitudes and interests were concerned?

RADM BROWN: I think I could have gone the other way, but for me, it was what I really wanted to do.

INTERVIEWER: It's what you wanted.

RADM BROWN: Right, yes.

And frankly, even though Commander Jones talked about the long view, my view wasn't quite as long as his. So each incremental step was something I really wanted to do. I could have been an instructor at the Coast Guard. I can go to graduate school. I can go aboard a ship as an engineer officer. I can do this? I'm raising my hand, "I'd like to do that." I cant be the number-one engineer in the Coast Guard? I want to do that, yes. I think I want to do that.

INTERVIEWER: Anything else from your career or just your philosophy?

RADM BROWN: I guess in the end, it would be the Coast Guard, just for me, it was a perfect fit. It was unbounded opportunities but enormous and increasing responsibility. I don't think that there are any finer people. I don't consider myself anything special or different. I think my story is everyone's story. Everyone I have ever met, I've always awed at how they've worked so hard, how intelligent and innovative they are. These are my teammates, and to be able to surround yourself with a team like that is just phenomenal. You can't expect but except to have these kinds of extraordinary outcomes when you have an extraordinary group like this, and it goes all the way back to the culture that I think is effectively inculcated in the Coast Guard.

I'm proud to have had the opportunity to do that. I know at times I had my doubts when I was at the Coast Guard Academy and doing some other things, maybe when I was standing between those diesel engines on the icebreaker and they're bigger than me and I'm all over the place. I'm sick, throwing up, but in the end, if I had to do it all over again, I'd do everything exactly the same.

INTERVIEWER: Anything else that I have haven't asked you or covered that you want to say anything about?

RADM BROWN: No.

INTERVIEWER: Talked out at this point? Okay. Thank you very much, sir. I greatly appreciate your doing it.

[Audio break.]

INTERVIEWER: Okay. So we're back here for a few minutes with Admiral Erroll Brown.

RADM BROWN: So you'd asked about some highlights of my career, things that happened during my career that had a lasting impression on me and changed me.

As I was selected for a flag officer, I had occasions to speak. On one particular occasion, I had been asked to speak for the stewards, the Stewards Association, and I think it was down in the Miami area, and I was recall flying down there to make that speech.

I was with Master Chief Patton, who was the master chief of the Coast Guard, a first black master chief, and I just remember the welcome I got from the stewards. They inducted me as an honorary member, and I was just overwhelmed by their just pride in the fact that I had accomplished what had been accomplished. It was very evident to me that it was their success and not mine, and I can't put into words. Of all of the speeches I've given and all of the events I have gone to and all of the people I have met, the ones that have most profoundly touched me were that group down in Miami. It instilled such pride in me that I cannot put in words.

I know a lot of people talk about other things that they did during their career, but just to be able to go down there with them for me was clearly a high point in my flag career.

INTERVIEWER: Anything else you want to say beyond that?

RADM BROWN: No. Something will come up in the car, but you've got to turn it off sooner or later.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Thank you very much.

RADM BROWN: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW