

Interview Summary Form

Interview Details

Interviewee Name: CAPT Scott Beeson Date: 9/2/10 Time: 8:00am
 Interviewee Title: NIC Chief of Staff Interviewee Job Location: Washington, DC
 Interviewer Name(s): Team Interview Location: Washington, DC

Interview Questions

Initial Question 1: What was your job/role and how did it evolve (if at all) during the DEEPWATER HORIZON Incident? Was the Deputy NIC stood up right away? What were your primary roles as the Deputy NIC?	
Focus Area: Role of the NIC	Question 1: How was the NIC organized? What was your role? Describe your relationship with the BP representatives? Have you participated in a SONS exercise? Did your experience in the SONS 2010 exercise prepare you for your role during this response?
Focus Area: UAC	Question 2: How would you improve your ability to incorporate resources, such as people or equipment, from state agencies (i.e., Maine) and industry if they have specialized knowledge and can support the USCG or other Federal agency in a response?
Focus Area: Involvement of Senior Agency Officials	Question 3: What was the involvement of the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of DHS in your response organization?
Focus Area: Quantification	Question 4: How much did the constant change in quantification affect your ability to deal with elected officials and agency heads?
Focus Area: Relationship to the NRF	Question 5: How can the NCP be rationalized with the NRF, the Stafford Act and States acting under their own emergency authorities?
Focus Area: Political Demands	Question 6: To what extent did politics enter the response and affect the response from your perspective? Did the NIC need to broker competing demands by elected officials?
Focus Area: ACP	Question 7: How was information management coordinated at the NIC?
Focus Area: Political Demands	Question 8: How did you address the constant media coverage and confusion over who was in charge of the response?
Focus Area: Role of the NIC	Question 9: Was the NIC involved in tactical decisions such as the booming?
Focus Area: Political Demands	Question 10: Describe your involvement in the application subsea dispersants, the waiver process, and the determination of daily quantity caps?
Final Question 1: What were the top 2 "best practice(s)" during this incident, from your perspective?	
Final Question 2: What do you assess to be the top 2 "areas needing improvement" (or downright "failures") from your perspective, and do you have any related recommendations regarding these areas?	
Final Question 3: Is there anything else we should know?	
Final Question 4: Who else should we interview?	

Notes

Initial Question: What was your job/role and how did it evolve (if at all) during the DEEPWATER HORIZON Incident? Was the Deputy NIC stood up right away?

- Serves as a USCG Reservist and has been on active duty for some time now.
- Came to DWH via a couple of paths. Served as USCG 7th District Joint Field Office Support Team Leader. After Katrina, they were designed to bridge USCG inequities between FEMA FCOs and PFOs. Served as the team leader for about 5 years. That has afforded a great deal of interagency, ICS senior leadership training, and the ability to work with other partners.
- Manages an interagency operations center in Charleston, SC, with about 30 different agencies working together daily for homeland security purposes.
- Participated in the SONS exercise this past spring. Has attended the SONS training, which served as additional training for his JFO training. He had an opportunity back in March for training on SONS.
- When the spill occurred, he was back in his day job, and CG-533 asked him to come here to DC to work and manage information flow. He helped stand up the DCO Watch and ran it for a couple of days.
- When the NIC was started, he worked for ADM Allen. He looked at the guidance that existed and created a NIC organization, reviewing it with ADM Allen, and then established the NIC. We had a good document called a NIC Incident Management Handbook that was closely on target.
- One lesson learned is that the interagency organization during the exercise paled to the interagency organization that existed to deal with the impact of the oil spill. So there was recognition that the Interagency Solutions Group needed to be stood up. So the NRT membership had to become full-time players in the consequence management portion.

Question 1: How was the NIC organized? What was your role? Describe your relationship with the BP representatives? Have you participated in a SONS exercise? Did your experience in the SONS 2010 exercise prepare you for your role during this response?

- The fundamental difference between the guidance the NIC had and the organization that was put in place is the scope of the interagency participation given the scale of the spill and the level of situational awareness in response to the spill, and then sharing it with the entire government.
- Our interagency perspective and the SONS exercise really focused on the response and moved a little into the NIC role into resource coordination. And when the NIC was stood up, while there was alignment with the policy, the interagency participation in finding solutions was much bigger than anyone imagined.
- It went from a Situation Unit during the exercise that was primarily dealing with the Unified Area Command (UAC) to a Situation Unit that was three or four times bigger and an information flow to the entire government. The level of detail and information was incredible.
- The NIC and ISG were complementary organizations. CAPT Lloyd, who was co-chair of the NRT, was meeting with them daily. Using the NRT as a consulting body to the NIC was the preferred way, and the interagency team that was assembled was addressing policy relative to the effects of the spill as opposed to actual spill response. So when the NIC looked at residents in the Gulf who were impacted, it looked at how they could be supported? That discussion was taken to the ISG rather than the NRT, because the NIC wanted the NRT to focus on spill response, while ISG focused on the fallout and impacts.
- Within the NIC, staff would identify a problem, such as the looking at how the loop current would take oil along western Florida and into Cuba. So the NIC looked at the engagement strategy for Cuba. The NIC worked with ISG on the impact to Cuba while the NRT reported directly to the NIC on spill response, while the ISG reported to the Assistant Secretary at DHS who reported to the NIC for coordinating all other things.
- CAPT Beeson could not recall if there was talk of elevating the NRT to a Principal level, but added that sometimes the NRT was elevated to that level because there were Principals on their calls. The thinking was that there were aspects of spill response that didn't deal directly with the oil spill itself.

Question 2: How would you improve your ability to incorporate resources, such as people or equipment, from state agencies (i.e., Maine) and industry if they have specialized knowledge and can support the USCG or other Federal agency in a response?

- At the NIC level, he did not think that staff ever talked about bringing in other states' spill response personnel, other than perhaps into the ISG. Thinking about it now, he said he wrestles with where they would put those people – probably in the ISG.
- On one hand, the NIC was an organization that is dealing with the entire government, making sure everyone knew everything they could possibly know about the spill. The NIC might have been able to put some Situation Unit people in there to support those people.
- It might be possible to put some people in the NIC, or also the UAC, so they could interact with other people dealing with the spill.

- The NIC staff in the documentation is a 12 to 14 person staff. The intent was to keep the staff light so they were supporting the NIC proper. But it ended up they were supporting the entire government. It grew into something else.
- The NIC did not identify other people for the response in the NIC. That was handled in the UAC and farther down the chain.

Question 3: What was the involvement of the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of DHS in your response organization?

- During the first few weeks of the response, S-1 and S-2 may have been less trained in the NCP doctrine. The NIC was doing a considerable amount of information sharing relative to comparing a Stafford response to a non-Stafford pollution response, with issues of the RP, and funding. This interaction was occurring both at the federal level and down to the states. There was a lot of discussion about whether it could become a Stafford Act declaration. There were several white papers on Stafford Act vs. non-Stafford Act.
- There was a lot of participation by many people throughout the government. Legal departments were involved. CAPT Beeson did not ever perceive that the discussion was getting in the way of what the NIC was going to do. The discussion was more focused on could a Stafford Act be declared, how can it be declared, how would the states be involved? After it was discussed during the first two weeks, the issue went away.
- CAPT Beeson was in Washington, D.C., for two days before staff started discussing how big this event was and that there might have to be a SONS declaration. But the Stafford Act discussion weighed in more with funding rather than organizational response. Discussions also centered around what could happen in a state that would trigger a Stafford Act, stand up a JFO, and how would it interact with a NIC.
- The S-1's role and the NIC's role ended up complementary. Since a NIC hadn't been established before, there was a lot of talk about roles and responsibilities and representation to the other departments.
- During the SONS exercise, an Admiral acted on behalf of the Secretary as either the PFO or acting Secretary. During the SONS exercise, it did not go past the relationship of HSPD 5. Staff were focused on how the NIC would be supported, rather than the relationship between the NIC and S-1. There were times on the NRT calls where almost every assistant secretary participated. That was a broad participation. I think the SONS exercise allowed us to reach into DHS.
- CAPT Beeson was not sure if there is any other way to set up a JFO without a Stafford Act declaration. The JFO is organized to coordinate the delivery of services through the state. The NIC was organized to help the UAC respond to the oil spill – interaction with Congress and the Administration. So they are two different-focused organizations. It might be possible to have had a JFO established if necessary, and it could have helped the NIC, but they were focused on delivery of services. It could have sat next to the UAC and handled logistical activities.

Question 4: How much did the constant change in quantification affect your ability to deal with elected officials and agency heads?

- One of the very first products the NIC staff produced was a worst –case scenario discharge. The NIC focus was on what could the worst case, and how would the NIC organize to respond to that. And that was being shared with DHS and the White House. There was a volume used and it was taken from some MMS documents and some NOAA participation (CAPT Beeson could not recall exactly what the volume was).
- Then the discussion became, “how much is actually coming out?” So NIC was then focused on how to keep whatever oil was coming out and keeping it offshore. That seemed to be a side discussion while people were more focused on how to respond to the oil. The NIC was focused on how big it could be, while others were focused on how much oil was coming out. The NIC also recognized that accurately estimating the flow rate would be extremely challenging since it was a mile below the surface. The NIC didn't really have the expertise to estimate the number. So that's why a technical team of academics and experts was established to work on the issue.
- There was pressure to come up with a flow rate, but it came from a national desire to know the exact amount. There was not pressure from the Administration. But there was an expectation on the team's part to have a number by a certain date, and then when the NIC realized that they just weren't going to have a number, it had already created an expectation, and then there was a messaging problem. The NIC wanted academia and the scientific community involved, and they arrived at a number, but then it was modified. But the NIC was always working on a worst-case scenario.
- With NCP and the Stafford Act, the debate really centered on what was the best way to pursue the response. With the Stafford Act, the discussion would be centered on taxpayer funds, while OPA90 focused on the RP. The Stafford Act discussion came from other parts of the government.
- CAPT Beeson said he never saw a leadership struggle with FEMA.

Question 5: How can the NCP be rationalized with the NRF, the Stafford Act and States acting under their own emergency authorities?

- Organizationally, the USCG needs to further understand how the two align.

- The JFO and UAC are similar in nature that they are working to deliver something across a broad range. The JFO may have more of a tactical focus, such as supplying food and water, while the UAC is looking at the response to an incident. If we had another national disaster that was SONS in nature, such as an earthquake, where you have a response with delivery of services, you may need to arrange for an incident-specific response supported by the NIC. There needs to be some organizational alignment.
- Under ESF-10 in Katrina, there were some Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund monies to clean up ESF-10 related impacts. There was discussion that if a Stafford Act was declared, would the spill response be just ESF-10? This is an area that bears some real discussion. Normally within an oil spill response, you handle smaller amounts of claims, so maybe some of those types of issues become more like a JFO. There's a scope difference.

Question 6: To what extent did politics enter the response and affect the response from your perspective? Did the NIC need to broker competing demands by elected officials?

- Fundamentally, politics entered the response in several ways. It was evident that we (i.e., the ICP, UAC, NIC, and Federal government) needed situational awareness and level of impact at the lowest possible level—the parish level, the county level. The county administrator and parish presidents know from their residents what's being impacted, so we at the top need that level of awareness, too. Otherwise the NIC is getting its information from the administrators and parish presidents by watching them do interviews in the media. We need our situational awareness of the spill from the ground. The scope and level of information from this event was far beyond what we ever envisioned.
- On a call with the governors of the affected states, they wanted to know if the citizens on the boats helping with boom were citizens of their states, or citizens of non-affected states. That's a finite piece of information that we needed to know, but it is not something we would typically have in our spill response.
- Boom was a big issue. States knew where they wanted the boom. But boom was a discussion at the deputy level or higher. So it all goes back to situational awareness. We spent a lot of time looking at supply chain.
- What we did as the NIC staff was to help elected officials understand competing demands, not necessarily broker them. For example, there was a lot of interest with boom, especially when you have multiple states involved. So NIC helped the government understand what boom we had, what was needed, and what happens when we put it out in the sea. There was a time when we needed to move boom from Louisiana to Alabama, but it was environmentally sensitive based. We have Area Contingency Plans (ACPs) that were agreed to by local, state, and the Federal government, but when it came to the response, were re-negotiated on the fly in real time. So politics were involved in that level, because we had to reallocate resources when the plans called for doing something else.

Question 7: How was information management coordinated at the NIC?

- The first tool the NIC chose to use was HSIN. We chose it because it is already deployed, operational, CAPT Beeson has had experience with it, one can have interagency partners participating in it, and it could be used for communications between the AC and the NIC.
- Anyone with authorization could log in and see data. We posted incident action plans (IAPs), logs, etc.
- HSIN has an archival and organizational capability that worked really well. We found there was not a lot of training needed for HSIN.
- The NIC also used HSIN was because it was believed to have been used at all levels of government.
- There was a competing question about whether the NIC should use WebEOC. What they found is that HSIN worked best. WebEOC is good for chat between counties and state, but HSIN gave the NIC information management, archival information, and knowledge portals.

Question 8: How did you address the constant media coverage and confusion over who was in charge of the response?

- Fortunately, the decision was made early on to establish a JIC and to put some other senior leadership to run the JIC. That was a great decision.
- The NIC's role in working with the JIC was information synchronization, making sure there was an authoritative source for each piece of data, so when it is posted and published, everyone knows where it came from.
- There was no Washington press corps at USCG HQ. Taking ADM Allen to the media was an effective tool. But also giving them a robust POC in the JIC was useful, too, even though the JIC was probably overwhelmed at times.
- After a few weeks, the NIC was pretty successful in having the government become the main source of information. It took awhile to get it up to that level though.

Question 9: Was the NIC involved in tactical decisions such as the booming?

- What the NIC delved into was understanding the tactical decisions being made. The NIC had a big situational unit. NIC staff

probably drove the UAC crazy about wanting to understand why decisions were made and the reasoning behind such decisions.

- ADM Allen may have been involved in tactical decision-making. But the NIC staff really did not get involved in it.
- There may have been a perception that the UAC felt it was being questioned or second guessed when we would ask them why they were making certain decisions.
- The NIC had lots of offers of international assistance coming in. There might have been times that the critical resource staffers felt that the NIC staff was encouraging them to look at a list of offers. NIC was not trying to drive operations, but we knew there was a critical need for certain types of resources, and there were offers for those resources coming from other countries, and that is part of NIC's charter—to broker resources and look at the entire supply chain.
- Perhaps BP wanted to move in a different direction. There was a perception at the lower levels that did not match what the reality was of why the NIC was asking questions and recommending resources. That may have been perceived as taking part in tactical decisions.
- The vessels of opportunity (VOO) program was probably a tactical decision, because there was a need for resources to skim and collect oil, and the NIC needed to identify ways to corral the oil.
- The NIC had to balance tactical decisions with national relations, going back down the chain of command to get answers to questions coming from the national level.
- Answer: Yes, we had a lack of a common operating picture (COP) for two weeks. It was detrimental to information flow. We had to mobilize a substantial number of people to develop a COP. The UAC had to sign off on all technical procurements to develop that COP. Issues came up regarding how to track all VOOs, get consistent aerial surveillance, and deconflict airspace management. COP was a tactical and national issue.

Question 10: Describe your involvement in the application subsea dispersants, the waiver process and the determination of daily quantity caps?

- CAPT Beeson was in USCG HQ when the NIC had numerous dispersant issues. However, the NIC staff were not that involved in the dispersant issue. But the NIC was because he had to mediate the issues.
- Given the volume of dispersants used, there was a constant tension of how much should be used? The demand on the long-term impacts on the environment grew as well. At the NIC staff, we tried to push tactical decisions back to the UAC and the RRT. But the decision-making ability was removed from the RRT, and it went to the departments/agencies senior-level officials involved. It never came to the NIC staff to approve dispersants, but rather to the department/agency heads. Then it took true leadership to get people together to discuss alternate courses of actions to keep oil offshore.
- It was clearly understood by Principals who had the authority to do what. But when a department/agency becomes involved in something that is at the FOSC level, then the NIC must get involved because he supports the FOSC. (CAPT Beeson wondered if an FOSC may feel extreme pressure when an agency is getting into the decisions, without the NIC to liaison.)

OPEN FLOOR:

Were there any controls to ensure that the NIC did not have too many requests going down to the UAC?

- There was robust debate. Neither the UAC nor the NIC had any concept of the amount of information that is required when there is a national-level event. In this digital age, we have to look at information flow. The NIC agreed to queue info requests, using HSIN, so UAC could manage the response to requests more effectively.

Some have suggested a skeletal NIC in place so it would not have to be built from scratch? What do you think of that?

- Let's start with information management. We need a national infrastructure for that. It cannot be ad hoc or on the fly. These days, everything is real time.
- As for scrambling to get the NIC started, it was a scramble to put it together. We need to get the right people on the team, gather all the information, and put it into an appropriate document.
A highly successful organization was the Interagency Strategic Team, which would take emerging issues and brainstorm courses of action, such as the Cuba engagement and similar issues. They took a lot of ideas to the ISG.
- National-level training and JFO interagency training was very helpful.

Was EPA represented in the IASG? Was there any info disseminated on use of dispersants in the IASG? Was there a lot of surprise when the EPA Administrator weighed in so heavily?

- EPA was represented in the IASG. Dispersant use was a constant ongoing dialogue. There was perhaps a little surprise when the EPA Administrator weighed in.
- It was a constant back and forth, checks and balances. We brought it to the national level, which was a challenge.

Final Question 1: What were the top 2 “best practice(s)” during this incident, from your perspective?

- CAPT Beeson felt well prepared coming into the NIC based on the SONS and JFO training. He felt like he knew what the NIC was supposed to do and could put it all in place. Staff coming into the NIC were also well prepared.

Final Question 2: What do you assess to be the top 2 “areas needing improvement” (or downright “failures”) from your perspective, and do you have any related recommendations regarding these areas?

- Understanding how to provide a level of information necessary for an effective response. The NIC was not prepared to provide the level of detail for situational awareness for this kind of national incident. We don't have a national means to do that. How are we going to get from ground level tactical information up to the White House?

Final Question 3: Is there anything else we should know?

- A lesson learned: The traditional model in hurricane response is that we would assign a junior officer to the county EOC, and a more senior officer to the state level to ensure interaction. Now we have senior commanders assigned to counties and parishes, so we have peer-level relationships. That is a fundamental shift. We can defuse many issues by doing that. But we have to have a certain number of trained senior officers available to do it.

Final Question 4: Who else should we interview?

- Question not asked.