

Jonathan Mobley
Customs and Border Protection
Port of Baltimore

Meet Jonathan Mobley

I am Jonathan Mobley. I'm the Chief of Tactical Enforcement Branch for Customs and Border Protection here in the Port of Baltimore. I grew up here in Baltimore, Maryland ... stayed here for about twenty years. Then I joined the Military, went away for twelve years. When I came back to Baltimore, I'd been to the terminal once, drove by many of times and never knew what was going on here. Once ... later when I came to work for CBP, there was a big change. It's like; I didn't know all this was going on, the amount of cargo that comes through here, the amount of cars that goes out here, the amount of cars that come into the Port. It was a learning experience. I'm still learning today.

Explain what you do. Talk about an average day at work for you.

I'm responsible for insuring that all cargo that comes into the country is screened by our officers ... cargo screened to insure that there is no terrorist interest in the cargo, there's no criminal activities such as drug smuggling, money laundering, illicit entry of aliens, possible weapon of mass destruction, coming in.

Containers are screened using some of our non-intrusive inspection system. We actually have containers sent to our sheds, where we actually open them up, devan the container, look for anything that's illegal.

In my position as chief tactical enforcement officer, daily, there's phone conversation dealing with employees. I'm dealing with other managers. I'm dealing with importers or passengers, responding to, ... maybe there can be some complaints or responding to possible prohibited merchandise in the container. So basically at the first part of my day, I'm responding to emails, answering phone calls. In the latter part of the day, I'm in the fields, watching the officers work, helping identify cargo that's in the container, looking for narcotics, possible narcotics could be smuggled or identifying if there's any illegal individual on the vessel.

How did you prepare for this career? How did your career begin?

After I left the Air Force, this was the perfect job for me. I started off as a part-time employee, working at the airport, processing passengers. There, the process passenger coming from all over the world. My background in the military helped me [be] able to deal with the passengers, deal with the different cultures. From there, especially Europe, you're dealing with European culture, I was able to understand the language barriers that we had, and it's very interesting. Once I got there, I said, "I'm not leaving," I did everything I can to make myself available to stay.

What personality traits or interests can be a good match for this career?

Some of the personality's qualities that can help is ... outgoing, self motivated, self motivated gets you in a long way, self motivation. Communications, being able to communicate with people, and listening, you have to have good listening skills in order to get ahead here.

What parts of your education do you use most often in this career?

All the courses are important: your mathematics, your English, your communication skills, computer skills, even being athletic helps. We have a lot of physical work. Physical work is done here, dealing with containers, (well speaking of Baltimore) dealing with open containers, jumping into containers, climbing on board vessels, searching crew cabins, to searching vehicles, it's a lot of physical endurance that's needed in this field. So everything that you've learned in high school can be used here with CBP. Nothing's, everything's important.

What has been the career track that's gotten you from your first job to where you are now? What special degrees or licenses did you need to get along the way?

When I started, I started working as passenger processing at the airport (BWI International Airport), and from there, I branched off into working at our cargo branch there. I spent two to three years there, examining cargo. From there, I came down to the seaport, where most of our work ... seaport is ... working with passenger (POVs) privately own vehicles, dealing with the Stolen Car team. There were a lot of stolen cars going out of the Port, so I was trained to identify which vehicles were being shipped out of the country illegally. From there, I went back to the airport as a supervisor for the Passenger Processing Unit. I was the Lead Targetor for our Passenger Announcing Unit, there with the attempt to identify those individuals who were smuggling narcotics. From there, I was promoted to supervisor here back in Baltimore, back at the airport again, the Lead Supervisor there dealing with passengers, cargo, everything there. Spent two years there and I promoted to Chief of Tactical Enforcement here in Baltimore. So I have overall, enforcement action all over the Port of Baltimore.

What is the best part of your career?

Providing the training to the new officers that was afforded to me. I have to watch them, see them get better than I was. Okay, training is a big thing and I like to teach. I can say most of the officers that I've trained ... they're either now supervisors or they had gone to different agencies: FBI, DEA, State Department. So you know, good thing to see kids grow up after you trained them.

How has your work changed over the years? What role has technology played in those changes?

After the 911, the field has changed dramatically. There was once the legacy Customs, legacy Immigration, and a legacy Agriculture which are now combined into one agency: Customs Border Protection. When I first came in, Customs only dealt with people and cargo coming in the country .. we were specifically looking for drugs. Okay, now we're looking for illegal aliens, drugs and agriculture issues, looking for pests. Now technology, since 911 again, probably the technology ... we didn't use a lot of high, high tech x-ray machines. Now we have various high tech x-ray machines that we utilize to screen cargo, screen containers. We have a VACIS Machine that actually screens cargo coming in off the ship. A container runs through the system, it screens, we can detect anomalies. If something's in the containers, it doesn't match the manifest, and then we know something is wrong with this container. We have a Radiation Portal Monitor System that scan for radiation in containers. If it shouldn't be there, we'll pick it up. It detects gamma and neutron rays.

How does your work fit into the larger framework of the work at the Port?

When there are containers that we want to look at, we talk to Terminal Operators, who inform and let the longshoremen know that these containers need to be brought to Customs for examination. If there's an issue as far as hazardous cargo, we then inform Coast Guard that there is hazardous cargo in this container, and they'll come out in take a look at it for safety issues. All in all, we work hand-in-hand throughout the Port dealing with international cargo coming into the country and also leaving the country.

What advice would you have for anyone who wants to have the kind of career you have?

If someone wanted to enter this field, it [might be] through a course study in Criminal Justice in college ... through also a military ... law enforcement background. If you have computer skills that we need today, we have communication skills that we need today. Entry level ... basically we have technicians that they can start out, customs technicians, where you work along side of the officers, but you won't actually do any of the real enforcement work, but you'll look at documents, process papers, take phone calls and be there for a year or two then you can gradually move into becoming an officer. Within the agency, there is a lot of room for advancement. We provide a lot of training to honing your skills. From there you can move on. Move up constantly, it's constantly upward mobility in the agency, you don't get stuck in one level; there is always opportunity to move ahead. It's on the individual if he wants to get ahead in the agency.