

Assistant dean recalls time as NCIS agent

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In honor of [“NCIS: New Orleans,”](#) which premiered with [17.1 million viewers](#) Tuesday (Sept. 23), the Insider revisits a conversation with [Jim Letten](#), former U.S. Attorney and Tulane University Law School assistant dean of experiential learning, in which he talks about his time as a real-life NCIS agent. Earlier this month, Letten was invited to visit the set, where he watched the filming of an episode.

What's the most dangerous thing you've ever done as a NCIS agent?

Working undercover a number of years ago, doing the counter-drug operations downtown and making arrests, including having to chase and tackle subjects while you're armed, and not knowing if they're armed, all the while during the struggle making sure that your own weapon wasn't taken and used against you, was somewhat stressful, I'd say.

Is there anything realistic about the TV show "NCIS"?

Yes. I was sort of surprised. In the initial episode (last fall), NCIS was jointly working with the Secret Service and FBI on a homicide investigation that involved Air Force One. Completely fictitious, of course, but more realistic elements than I anticipated.

The Secret Service part and the Air Force One part reminded me of my fondest recollections of my days as an NCIS officer/agent and that was the incredible opportunity to work actively in numerous presidential and vice presidential protective service details.

It's hard to describe how focused you can be when you find yourself standing about two inches from the President of the United States, on one side of him, and knowing that you're responsible for preventing anything happening to him.

Were you more like NCIS Special Agent Gibbs or more like Agent Tony DiNozzo?

Neither. The NCIS agents are full-time civilian special agents from whom I learned so much, and for whom I have the very utmost respect and admiration. We were commissioned Naval Reserve officers with dual roles, both as military officers and also in roles that overlapped the civilian agents. When on duty, we worked under those agents.

[See full article](#) in the Fall 2013 *Tulane Lawyer* magazine.

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