

Narrator: You're listening to the Quarterdeck with Benjamin Strong and Coastguard Admiral Jim Watson.

Benjamin: Hi, it's Ben Strong from Amver.com and I'd like to welcome everyone to the fourth edition of the Quarterdeck. My co-host Admiral Watson is with me. How are you, sir?

Admiral Watson: I'm doing fine, Ben. How are you?

Benjamin: I'm good. Thank you. I'm good. Thank you. And a little excited today. It's been a busy week in Amver and for you guys, down in the fifth district in our Atlantic area, we've had two big rescues going on in this past week, the first involving a Royal Caribbean cruise ship, the Celebrity Equinox. As you know, they helped out some German sailors that were 850 miles east of Bermuda last Friday. I believe that was May 6th. That's out there quite a ways, isn't it, sir?

Admiral Watson: That is and that's where Amver vessels, participants in Amver are just absolutely critical. They are essential to saving lives in that area of the world.

Benjamin: Yeah, those sailors run a 43 foot catamaran and I know that they suffered some vessel damage from some bad weather but they were also running out of fuel and the Celebrity Equinox was able to divert, give them that fuel. And really without the assistance and the partnership of our Amver participants, those are folks that may never have gotten any assistance that far out.

Admiral Watson: Yeah, and you know, we do have, I think pretty good capabilities in the Coastguard to receive those May Day calls and then all we really need at that point is to figure out how can we get an asset to them. Fortunately, the Celebrity Equinox was near enough and was able to divert and it was a very successful outcome.

Benjamin: It was and it really shows, it shows that Amver, you know, we don't just rely on a bulker or a container ship. It doesn't matter what vessel is out there. A, if you're already enrolled in Amver, you never know, we may be calling on you. And if you're not enrolled because you think, perhaps, your vessel, maybe it's an offshore supply vessel, whatever the case may be, if you don't think that your ship could be helpful, we could probably both agree that any ship is helpful, though, in an emergency. So, that's why, you know, we work so hard at our office here in New York to enroll a variety, all sorts of vessels that are going to be out on the water because we can't be everywhere and the Celebrity Equinox just demonstrated that there really isn't a place that we can't get help to somebody when they need it.

And that, you know, just follows up with Wednesday morning on May 11th, we had a ship, another catamaran, 900 miles off the coast of Boston, ended up sinking and we had a bulker, an Amver participating ship. This was a K-line vessel that rescued two Italian sailors. So, another great case, another instance where without Amver, we may not have been able to get something there as quickly as this ship. This ship happened to have been 28 miles away from the distress location. So, it really doesn't get any better than that.

Admiral Watson: Right. Those sailors are very lucky when that kind of situation occurs. So, kudos to both of those merchant ships and their crews for making those rescues, and, you know, continuing the great tradition that we have as seafarers in looking after one another when they're in distress at sea no matter where they are.

Benjamin: You know, it sounds cliché and we say that we've been saving lives at sea since 1958. One

of our other tag lines is ensuring no call for help goes unanswered. But when you ask these survivors or if you ask the crews of other merchant ships that are enrolled, the world really relies on Amver and, you know, whether it be the Coastguard's area of responsibility in the Pacific or the Atlantic, the Gulf of Mexico, the Caribbean or anywhere in the world really because this has been a busy week, a busy couple of weeks where we've had a lot of requests for Amver data from around the world.

I'll include a link in the show notes for rescue professionals that may work in Argentina or we've had the French request information for the area around Gris Nez. We've had request for help come from the Mediterranean, the Far East, from all around the world. Amver isn't just our tool, the Coastguard tool but we want to share it with the world. And whether it be recruiting more ships into the program or encouraging our SAR [sp] shipmates and colleagues around the world to use Amver, that's what it's there for. It's for the whole world.

Admiral Watson: Absolutely and, you know, we've over the years put together a good system of rescue coordination centers that cover the entire world. But each one of them like our district 5 and our district 1 rescue coordination centers depends on the assistance of other mariners at sea. We have -- Amver is really the longest standing and most successful organization that links those other ships at sea to those rescue coordination centers so that a successful rescue can be completed.

But, we've also, I think, improved in other ways that are also saving lives, things like the long range tracking and just better knowledge of where ships are at sea, and also better communications on the part of those that are in need of rescue, things like the EPIRBS and satellite communications. So, the trends are good but we certainly can't let our guard down. There's always, seems to be another case where somebody needs assistance and they need it quickly. You can't survive long in the ocean, once something terrible has gone wrong with your vessel.

Benjamin: That's absolutely right and I'm glad you mentioned EPIRBS, Admiral, because our capability to get resources to people is very good, whether it be a Coastguard cutter or an aircraft helicopter or fixed wing aircraft. But if we don't know that you're in distress, then your chances decrease significantly in being rescued. And both of these cases, the sailors that were in distress had EPIRBS, had them registered appropriately. I'll include a link in the show notes on at least -- well, I'll include links to both the national, our Noah EPIRB database and the International Registry because if we can't hear you, we can't get you.

If you don't have an EPIRB, it's very difficult to find you. And there needs to be a certain amount of responsibility on those that are going out to sea, whether it be in a merchant vessel or sailing in a catamaran or a sailboat or a fishing boat. So, you're absolutely right and I'm glad you mentioned that about the EPIRBS. We'll have those links in there because that's critical as well.

But one of the -- another interesting opportunity I had a few days ago was to go up to our Coastguard Sector, Long Island Sound, and I got to sit down with some officers and talk, Coastguard officers, and talk about the Amver system. It's while our international marketing efforts are critical. I would say that making sure that our shipmates in the Coastguard know about Amver is equally as important. And so it was real nice to sit down over a lunch and discuss Amver with both some junior and senior officers in Sector Long Island Sound. We talked a little bit about the Amver program, what it offers, the boating, the maritime community and what it offers the search and rescue community.

And then I had a great opportunity to sit down with Commander Amy Beach from the Prevention Department. And we talked a little bit about what if I'm a mariner, I'm on a ship and I'm coming to a

U.S. port, whether it be for the first time or, perhaps, I've traveled here, I've sailed here before, but we talked about what can a ship expect when coming into a U.S. port.

And you know as well as I do, if you read the maritime newspapers or the maritime magazines, often the Coastguard is, perhaps, criticized by the way we treat mariners or there's information that may not be accurate about a boarding or an inspection process. So, let's take a minute and listen to what I think is a great discussion between -- with Commander Amy Beach from the Prevention Department about what it's like when a ship comes to a U.S. port.

Benjamin: Hi, it's Ben Strong from Amver.com and I'm in New Haven, Connecticut at Sector Long Island Sound. Today we're going to talk a little bit about what a ship can expect when sailing into a U.S. port. There are lots of resources that are available for mariners, but some of them you may have never read or you may not know where to look for them. But, we're going to sit down with the experts here. I've got Commander Beach from Sector Long Island Sound. Commander, how are you ma'am?

Commander Beach: Good. Thank you.

Benjamin: Great. I thank you for joining us and let's talk a little bit about what a ship can expect. Again, lots of discussion on vessels that are coming into U.S. ports, some of it good, some of it not so good. But, let's just talk a little bit about when a -- if I'm on a 900 foot tanker and I'm coming into the Port of New Haven, what kind of things can I expect from the U.S. Coastguard?

Commander Beach: Sure. Well, first of all, vessels that are going to be reporting to the U.S. need to make 96 hour advanced notice to the National Vessel Movement Center. They can do that various ways. The preferred method is, and probably the easiest for most people, is to do it online. And that information will be transmitted to the port where the vessel is going to be going. So, we'll log in every morning into, it's a database called [sounds like Missile] and we'll get a download of what vessels are scheduled to come here. And that information that the vessel coming to our port will provide will be a list of crew members, what type of cargo they're going to have onboard, information about their certificates. Have they expired, when do they expire, that type of information. And that helps us build our package as far as what we're going to go onboard the vessel and look at.

So, once we've gotten all the information from the vessel, we'll go through, again, Missile and we'll look at the vessel's boarding history. When was the last time they were in the U.S.? Were there any deficiencies that were noted the last time that needed to be cleared this time that they're in there in our port? And we can even access some of the overseas port state control inspections and see if there were any issues in the other countries where they visited.

So, then we'll go onboard. The first thing we'll do is we'll walk onboard and, usually, a security member of the crew will meet us.

Benjamin: About how many folks come onboard?

Commander Beach: Well, it depends partly on the type of vessel, how large. But no more than four people unless we're doing training because what we try to do to make it easier and quicker for the vessels so that they can get on to what they want to do which is offloading the vessel or loading the vessel, is we'll try and break it up into teams. We'll have a team that'll do the deck and a team that'll go down and do the engine room and a lot of the mechanical stuff.

So, they'll get onboard. They'll go up, they'll meet the master, they'll sit down. They should explain exactly what it is they're going to be looking for, what documents they're going to need. And they'll say, "I'll need your Chief Engineer or First Engineer and I'll need your First Mate, whoever," and they'll break off into teams. You'll have a team that'll start going through the crew members' passports or identification, checking licensing to make sure what has been submitted to the National Vessel Movement Center matches what's actually there onboard, that type of thing. So, it'll be a lot of administrative paperwork type stuff that'll start it off.

While that team is doing that, the other team will usually break off and go down and start doing tests of emergency steering. And they'll check to make sure that there's proper communication between the bridge and emergency steering, that they'll make sure engine rooms are relatively clean. I mean, we're not looking to be able to eat off the floors, but you can't have excessive oil, fire hazards, things like that. So, we're focusing, primarily, on the safety aspect of and really to the benefit of the crew members that are onboard that have to sail these vessels to make sure that what they're going on is sea worthy and we'll get them to the next port and the port, thereafter.

And then we'll go on, we'll check navigation. Usually, it's the same team that went and checked the licenses and the passport information. They'll go up, they'll do checks of the navigation, again, check steering, check alarms to make sure that the alarms are working and things along those lines. So, it's, primarily, focused on safety. Of course, since 9/11, security has also started to play a role in that. So, we'll usually go through and ask to meet with the vessel's Security Officer and ask a few questions to -- it shouldn't be a kind of stump the chump, if you will, type of thing. But, just to say, "Do they seem to know their procedures, their processes?"

We are not -- unless we have major concerns, we should not be looking at the vessel's security plan. That is security information. So, if they're asked to provide it, they shouldn't feel bad to say "no" to the Coastguard team that asked them. There should be a specific reason and, frankly, the Coastguard team has to get authority from the flag state to look at those sections, and then it has to be a specific, "Well, I need to look at this section because we just did a bomb drill," and it doesn't seem like they really knew what their procedures were supposed to be. So, we want to see what it was they were supposed to do according to the plan and it doesn't match.

We'll do fire drills, lifesaving drills. Some ports, we don't do it here but some ports will go to the point of having fog machines so that these mariners, who hopefully are never going to have to be in a situation of fighting a fire onboard, see what it's like to not be able to see your hand in front of your face because there's so much smoke in an area and try to make those drills realistic. But, it's all to make sure that not only the vessels but the mariners out there are safe and make it to their next destination.

Benjamin: It sounds like a much more collaborative process than it is an adversarial process, really?

Commander Beach: It should be. Again, our whole point is to make sure that the mariners are safe and that they're getting what they need from their companies be it materials to repair problems that they have onboard. And that's not unusual for us to go onboard a ship, have a boarding and have a crew member say, "You know, we've been trying to get this part and we can't get this part. Could you put that down on your deficiency list?" And so we try to help out as much as we can. And I certainly expect and I think any port that you go to, if you were to talk to my counterpart, would expect that the teams going on are professional, and that they're treating the mariners with respect, the respect that they

deserve.

Benjamin: And these boarding procedures, whether it be here in New Haven, where we are today, or in Houston or L.A. Long Beach or New York, pretty standard across the board for the U.S. Coastguard, aren't they?

Commander Beach: They should be very standard and I can provide a link. We have what are called 840 books and they kind of go through a general outline of what material inspections we should be doing, equipment inspections, things along those lines. Certainly, there can be different interpretations on how a policy should be implemented, so you're going to see differences occasionally in different ports.

But, overall, if you pass an inspection in one port, you should be able to, if you were to go and have an inspection, not that you would cause you only get inspected the one time, but that it would be carried out in the same manner in the next port. And I know at the headquarters level, they strive to have that, to have it be, it doesn't matter what port you go to whether it's East Coast, West Coast, that it be very, very similar because there have been some, I don't want to say complaints, but concerns that have been expressed over the years that I can go to Houston and they do it this way and I go to New York and they do it another way.

So, headquarters will go through and look at inspection reports and things like that and try and clarify policy and say, "Hey, this is what we meant when we put out this navig," and things along those lines. So, yes, it should be very similar regardless of what port you're in.

Benjamin: Now, you mentioned the 840 book?

Commander Beach: Yes.

Benjamin: These inspection criteria, these aren't secret. Mariners can look this up and prepare before they come into port and we'll include links in the show notes for the podcast. But, you aren't doing secret things here. These are things that I, if I'm a mariner, if I'm the Master of a ship, I can have these checklists in a binder on my, in the ward room and we can be prepared long before we ever come into port.

Commander Beach: Absolutely. And they're in compliance with the International Maritime Organization of -- we signed an agreement of how Ports State Control program would work. And it won't be exact but there are certain guidelines that every country who has signed on to Solice [sp] and other things say, "These are the things we're going to look at and this is the level that we're going to hold you to." And our 840 book, basically, makes sure that our inspectors are going through and the same in every port, looking at the same types of things and interpreting IMO requirements as well as U.S. domestic laws on all these vessels.

Benjamin: Great. Well, we've discussed a little bit about what a mariner can expect when the Coastguard comes onboard. But, if I'm a mariner, what kind of things should I, perhaps, already have prepared or what should you expect from me as a commercial shipper coming into your port? What kind of things -- what can I do besides, perhaps, being prepared using the 840 book and some of the checklists and things that are available online or even through the podcasting we can provide? But, what kind of things can I do to make the process smoother, safer, faster?

Commander Beach: Well, I think one is making sure that the appropriate crew members are made available to us. Again, we know that they're in the business of getting in, offloading and getting out of port. But...

Benjamin: Everybody's in a hurry.

Commander Beach: Exactly, but if we need the Chief Officer or Chief Engineer, provide that because the longer we have to wait for those things, the longer it's going to take us to be able to say, "You know what, your ship is good to go," and you can do those things. So, making sure that the crews are available is good.

I would also say be honest and upfront. If you know that there's an issue with your vessel, don't wait and see if we find it. It doesn't make them look good. It doesn't make us -- it is a partnership. Tell us, hey, you have this problem and we're going to work with -- Basically, the Coastguard at that point will do whatever it can to work with the crew to make sure that those issues are addressed and done in as timely a manner as possible. It shouldn't be kind of a gotcha session. And so as long as they're upfront, they have their documents. Again, that's listed in the 840 book, what type of documents we'd need to see. You know, if those things are there and waiting for us when we come up, it just makes the whole process run a lot more smoothly.

Benjamin: So, again, it's a collaboration and I'm hoping that the listeners and the readers of the Amver blog and Quarterdeck and our umteen-thousand folks that participate in the Amver program know that it's a collaborative process. So, Commander, I thank you for your time and I'll make sure that we include links to all of the documents that we mentioned so folks can be prepared, have their things ready for when they come to New Haven and if they do steam into New Haven, I'll make sure that, hopefully, they'll say, "Hey, I heard you on the Quarterdeck."

Commander Beach: Yeah. Well, thank you very much and to your Amver participants we thank them for their service and the lives that they've saved over the last 50 plus years.

Benjamin: That's great. Thank you so much.

Commander Beach: Thank you.

Benjamin: And we're back from listening to that informative talk from Commander Beach about what a ship can expect when coming into a U.S. port and what the Coastguard can expect from a Master. It's not -- as Amy mentioned, as Commander Beach mentioned, it's a collaborative effort.

Admiral, you can probably speak to that as well, that the Coastguard boarding a vessel coming into a U.S. port isn't just a gotcha scenario. We're not trying to trip anybody up. In fact, as Commander Beach mentioned, these Coastguard 840 books are available online. There's no reason that a Master or a flag state can't have these things in binders on the ship. We're not out to hide anything and we'll include links to the Coastguard 840 books in the podcast. But it is a collaborative effort, isn't it, sir?

Admiral Watson: Absolutely. Yeah, and the philosophy here is that the entire world, now through the standards that have been agreed upon at the IMO, actually have the standards that people are trained to and that ship operators -- the business side are committed to providing so that the seafarers are going to get from one place to another in a safe way.

The government agencies and it's the Coastguard in the United States and just about every maritime country has some sort of an authority either to place their flag on a ship or to make sure there's compliance with these standards as a port state. So, the government, I think, plays a very important role in keeping the playing field levels between the seafarers and their companies and between the ports and the ships.

And, I think, the Coastguard actually does a pretty good job of it. We are in the middle sometimes between these different entities and it's hard to keep everybody happy all the time. The ports, I think, are looking to the Coastguard to make sure that these large ships with sometimes dangerous cargoes area absolutely safe and non-threatening to their constituents there in the port.

Benjamin: Right.

Admiral Watson: And I think, but I think the mariners are looking to the Coastguard or whatever the agency is in a foreign country to look after their safety and to look after the fact that they could be put into a situation either by the port or by the owner of the company that is untenable, you know, for them. They're professional mariners and they have to have a good ship and they have to have the right support.

And then, I think, the ship owners also benefit from this because they can't observe the mariners all the time anywhere in the world. So, these boardings take place. We make sure the credentials are good. We do some drills from time to time, make sure people are still practicing their profession the way they should. And so, I think it's a win-win system that's been honed through many, many years of practice and constantly needing improvement and there's changes and so on. But, I'm pretty proud of the way it works.

Benjamin: Well, thank you and that's really, it's not as if a Coastguard inspector wakes up in the morning and says, "You know, I'm going to go out and get somebody." I mean you mentioned it and Commander Beach mentioned it, if there's something that's unsafe for the crew, the Coastguard will act as a steward to help remedy that situation. So, we're not out to impede commerce. We're not out to just get a ship in and get a ship out, whether it be, you know, the Coastguard's mandate, our responsibility is to protect people, protect property, protect the seas. And this is just kind of a small portion of touching all three of those notes.

The Coastguard wants to ensure that, that crew is going to be safe on that ship both in port and then when they depart under their next journey. We want to keep our homeland safe, we want to keep the port safe and the seas and the area where that ship may be sailing. And I'm hoping that through this exchange that, perhaps, we're going to dispel some rumors that, you know, there are problems when sailing to America. And if people take exception to that, perhaps, they'll leave us some comments and engage a little bit in the exchange or, if fit, debate.

Admiral Watson: I hope they do. I think that's the value of the means that we have to dialog with the people that go to sea in a way today that we didn't have in the past. So, I would encourage that dialog. And I think that anything that is not in law or in a treaty is changeable. So, we can take a look at our practices, our routines, even the training of our people that do these inspections and make changes if there's a good case to do that. And I'm always open for those ideas.

Benjamin: Well, in this podcast, this forum is a great opportunity. People around the world or internationally who may be listening, may not, necessarily know that my co-host, Admiral Watson, is

just that, an admiral and is a senior leader in the Coastguard. So, if you've got a suggestion or an experience or something you want to share with senior Coastguard leadership, this is probably the easiest way to get that, to get that on your plate, isn't it, sir?

Admiral Watson: Absolutely. I try to do other engagements with the maritime community but that's my job. I think it's important that people have access to me and to the staff here so that we can be responsive and, you know, I think we've got a history of being able to listen and then enact change.

So, I suspect that they do a pretty fine job up there in New York. That's one of our largest and longest standing operations, really going back to World War I timeframe, even before 1915 when the Coastguard was created. But, we want that same proficiency and professionalism in any port that you might come into and be boarded by a team of Coastguard inspectors.

Benjamin: Well, that was something that Commander Beach mentioned as well. When mariners go online and perhaps look at these 840 books, at these inspection books that talk about -- what they lay out specifically, what -- I mean these are the checklists that the actual boarding team is going to use to look at things. And since everybody's going to be on that same page, things should be with the exception of, perhaps, minor regional differences, things should be pretty much the same around the United States and with each particular Coastguard team that may be coming aboard.

But one of the things, one of the other things you mentioned, sir, is getting out and talking to the mariners and this is certainly one platform that we use for that. Are you going to be traveling, attending anything in the near future or opportunities where people may have a chance to engage?

Admiral Watson: Well, I recently attended a meeting of the IFSMA, the International Federation of Ship Masters Associations and the CAMMM, the [sounds like Baltimore or Baltsmore]. That was a great meeting and we had a good dialog. So, I do those kinds of things. I will, of course, be observing the U.S. National Maritime Day which is coming up on the 22nd of May. They have a celebration here in Norfolk on Friday, the 20th. So, those are great opportunities that I never miss and inevitably, there's events popping on my calendar all the time. We're en mass to present on a particular subject whether it be navigation safety, marine safety in terms of the ships or security or environmental.

One of the issues that we're dealing with along the Atlantic coast that's generated a number of meetings and we just put a notice in the [sounds like fellow] register of our study that's ongoing and that'll be subject to public comment is these wind generators that the Department of Interior is wanting to lease the Outer Continental Shelf blocks to companies to put wind generators out there for making electricity. And, of course, there's concerns about navigation safety with them. So, that's just an example of the kind of thing that we get involved with.

Benjamin: I'm glad you mentioned Maritime Day, National Maritime Day, because we're going to be having -- I'm going to be out and about a little bit as well. So, if people are going to be traveling at all and want to talk to me about Amver or about our podcast, anything related to the commercial sector or safety, we're going to have our National Maritime Day Amver Awards Dinner on the 23rd of May in Washington DC at the National Press Club.

And then I'll be hopping on a plane the following day and we're flying out to Oslo. We'll be at Nord [sp] Shipping. Amver won't have a booth there but we'll be available to talk and chat if you want, and we're going to be holding an Amver Award ceremony at the U.S. Ambassadors residence in Oslo to recognize our Norwegian Amver partners. So, we'll be traveling a bit as well and like you said, it's a great chance

to engage people to kind of hear the deck play level of what's going on out in the maritime community.

So, I'm sure we'll have some reports back from those events and, like you said, we're out, we're available. You can leave comments on the blog here and we're happy to chat about whatever interests you.

Admiral Watson: Great.

Benjamin: Well, Admiral, I thank you very much for your time. I hope that our listeners find this particular episode interesting. Perhaps, it will spark some debate and we'll be back next month with a new topic and probably some insight from our travels. Thank you so much for joining us, Admiral.

Admiral Watson: Oh, thank you, Ben. I'll look forward to talking again next month.

Narrator: You have been listening to the Quarterdeck. Learn more about the Amver program at Amver.com. The Quarterdeck theme song is Botany Bay by the Blaggards, available at musicgallery.com or follow the link in our show notes.

Blaggards singing Botany Bay